University of Alberta

Breaking Trail: Factors That Enable Northern Aboriginal Students to Succeed in Higher Education

by

Denise M. Kurszewski

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

in

First Nations Education

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 2000

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-59756-3

Canada

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of Author:	Denise M. Kurszewski
Title of Thesis:	**Breaking Trail: Factors That Enable Northern Aboriginal Students to Succeed in Higher Education**
Degree:	Master of Education
Year This Degree Granted:	2000

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Denise M Kurszewski

P.O. Box 567
Fort Smith, NT
X0E 0P0

September 27, 2000

Abstract

This study utilizes a narrative inquiry to examine the factors that enable Aboriginal students from the Northwest Territories (NWT) to succeed academically in higher education. Through individual interviews and discussions, this thesis investigates, documents, and analyses the experiences of four academically successful students from the North to gain an understanding of how some Aboriginal students have succeeded in higher education in spite of the barriers.

The findings of the study demonstrate that a solid family foundation and pride in heritage and culture instilled in the students a strong spirit of positiveness and resilience, as well as a sense of efficacy. Recommendations based on the students' perceptions and on current social science research are also presented.

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Breaking Trail: Factors That Enable Northern Aboriginal Students to Succeed in Higher Education** submitted by Denise M. Kurszewski in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in First Nations Education.

Dr. P. Wilson
Co-Supervisor

Dr. S. Wilson
Co-Supervisor

Dr. J. Kirman

Dr. Toh Swee-Hin

September 22, 2000

Dedication

To the students of the North who I have had the honor of knowing and teaching over the years. You have taught me so much and instilled within me a desire to do something more.

To Jonathan and Jesse, my greatest source of strength and inspiration. Your spirit allows me to hope and dream.

Acknowledgements

I am especially grateful to the students who agreed to participate and share their time and stories about their educational experiences so willingly. This work would not have been possible without them. Their positiveness and success are an inspiration to all.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my co-supervisors, Drs. Peggy and Stan Wilson. Their encouragement, guidance, and expectations of me were greatly appreciated. I have also benefited from the advice, comments, suggestions, and encouragement of my supervisory committee, Dr. Joseph Kirman and Dr. Toh Swee-Hin.

I also thank my family and friends from the North and Alberta who have supported, guided, encouraged, and prayed for me throughout the course of my studies. Their love and friendship was much appreciated. A special thank you to Liz, for always believing in me. To the students of the First Nations Graduate Program at the University of Alberta, your friendship and support were so appreciated.

Masi Cho.

Table of Contents

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Origins of the Study	1
	Researching Métis Students	4
	History of the People	4
	Personal Connection	6
	Purpose and Objectives	7
	History of Formal Education in the Northwest Territories	8
	Terminology	12
	Limitations of the Study	12
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW	14
	Academic Achievement	14
	Standardized Testing	16
	Success—On Whose Terms?	17
	Minority Education	18
III.	METHODOLOGY	23
	Introduction	23
	Qualitative Research	23
	Ethnography as a Qualitative Method	24
	Narrative Inquiry	26
	Ethical Considerations	28
	Data Collection	29
	Method and Criteria for Selection of Participants	29

Chapter Page

IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS 32

Introduction 32

Participant Profiles 32

Amber 33

Dean 33

Brad 34

Janelle 34

Themes 35

Family Support and Influence 35

Connection to the Land 38

Role Models 41

Identity and Character 43

Elementary School 46

Cultural Programs and Local History 47

Academic Challenge and Extracurricular Activities 48

Community 49

Unity 50

High School 50

Teacher Expectations and Racial Differences 50

Preparation for Postsecondary Education 53

Transition to Postsecondary Institutions 54

V. CONCLUSION 57

Summary 57

Major Research Findings 58

Recommendations 59

Personal Reflections 64

Epilogue 72

REFERENCES 77

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Origins of the Study

The research journey on which I am about to embark is not beginning here. Throughout the process of establishing a final research topic, I was confronted with the realization that my own formal educational journey and my teaching experience were integral aspects of the evolution of the final product. Understanding and believing in the concept that I am the sum product of all of my experiences, I am aware that family, birth place, community, class, race, and gender are all significant factors in helping to shape my perspectives. I do not undermine or disqualify any of these factors which bring me to who I am at this moment in time. I struggled with the constant river of emotion as scenes and images of my own educational journey surfaced and resurfaced. This project strongly prescribed that I internalize, define, and articulate my comprehension of education as it related to my experiences. Though I may not have been conscious of it at the time, this process began almost 40 years ago in the small MacKenzie Delta community of Aklavik, Northwest Territories (NWT).

My earliest memories included a very strong desire to attend school before I had reached school age. These desires compelled me to follow my older sister one spring morning. My rubber boots became glued in the swamp of mud outside the building after everyone else had gone inside. I stood frozen beneath a window, from where I was able to hear recitals, songs, and instructions that aroused my curiosity, anticipation, and eagerness to attend school. My educational journey involved a cycle of experiences: I was a student, university graduate, teacher, and student once again. I attended northern elementary and high schools, a northern teacher education program, and a university in Saskatoon. For 12 years I worked in an elementary school in Fort Smith as a teacher and administrator, and I am finally pursuing a graduate degree at the University of Alberta.

Each one of these experiences has had a profound impact on the decisions I have made throughout my career and have guided my vision for a more positive educational experience for northern students. The experiences within these institutions are vivid. I encountered individuals who left a lasting impression. Some displayed understanding and fairness; others displayed unfairness, ignorance, and racism, both subtle and overt. The fundamentals of my thesis are rooted in this personal account, and the circumstances and experiences of my own life are inseparable from the purpose of my thesis.

It was always imperative that my research contribute to the educational experience of Aboriginal people in the NWT. I was familiar with the negative issues confronting the NWT educational system, where the majority of the students are Aboriginal: low academic achievement, high numbers of students with special needs, high dropout rates, and the problems associated with implementing cultural and language programs. To compound these difficulties, Aboriginal youth experience extremely high rates of suicide, incarceration, teenage pregnancies, and addictions. These issues are overwhelming and powerful; they drain resources and overwork school administration and social programs. Forty-two percent of Aboriginal children in the NWT do not finish Grade 9, and fewer than 2% of the students who start high school graduate (Quarter of NWT Budget for ECE, August 23, 1999, p. B12). The Department of Education, Culture, and Employment required $167.6 million in fiscal 1999-2000. In January 2000, teachers in the NWT voted to strike, citing special needs as a major issue. The *News North* headlines for January 10, 2000, Desperate Strategy for Desperate Times, stated, "No amount of window dressing can hide the fact the Northern education system is failing badly. The number of students graduating each year remains by far the lowest in the country; the drop out rate is the highest" (p. A7).

My studies and research initially focused upon understanding failures. The literature on the poor academic performance of "minority" students is extensive. Educational researchers are continually engaged in projects exploring the underlying

causes of failure. I, too, was caught in the continuing cycle of painting a negative portrayal of the Aboriginal educational experience. The classrooms in which I taught were no different from most classrooms in the NWT. There were difficulties. Classrooms were crowded, and addressing the variety of needs was sometimes exhausting. Yet many reminiscences are of the students' exceptional qualities. Some were artists, scholars, musicians, trappers, story tellers. They were all students with potential. My shoes were once again stuck in the mud; I did not want to contribute to the negative portrayal. Therefore, I focused on the University of Alberta, where keen, bright students from across the NWT were pursuing their dreams of becoming teachers, lawyers, scientists, and doctors. The very program in which I was enrolled consisted of Aboriginal students in master's and doctoral programs. The answers were all around me! These were success stories, and my research topic began to evolve. I needed to explore academic successes rather than failures in order to understand the factors that promote success. Meyer (1998) discussed Native Hawaiian education:

> Contrary to a deficiency model is the 'proficient' philosophy that looks at the needs of the students *along* with their assets, interests and potential. Proficient-based models do not turn a blind eye to the potential academic and social needs of the student: they simply *don't* stop there. Current research on gifted and talented education, and native Hawaiian education, shows that programs nationally and statewide are finding more success in programs that build upon students' talents and gifts as opposed to their so called deficiencies. (p. 4)

Pollard (1989) also suggested that investigating the successful educational experiences of minority children is vital:

> While many researchers have focused on describing and explaining the low academic performance of poor minority children, an alternative direction is more productive. The direction involves identifying minority students who are academically successful in school and determining what factors are associated with their success. In particular, there is a need to identify what Bloom calls 'alterable variables' which are associated with those students' academic success. (p. 298)

I agree with both of these views. Relying on the negative experience of low academic performance only advances the overall negative portrayal of Aboriginal people. Believing in the concept that everything is connected, I am also aware that education is a powerful implement which can serve to enhance or repress individuals or societies.

Researching Métis Students

History of the People

Indigenous people of the NWT, of the Athapaskan linguistic family, refer to themselves as *Dene.* Translated, it simply means *the people.* There are five main groups, which are divided by geographical regions. The most northerly group, whose traditional territory is between the Richardson Mountains and the Beaufort Sea, are the Gwich'in. Living within the Great Bear Lake region and along the MacKenzie and Liard Rivers are the Slavey. Between Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes live the Dogrib. Residing south of Great Slave Lake are the Chipewyan. Also in the South Slave region of the NWT are Cree, who are descendents of people who moved northward into the Boreal forests of northern Alberta in the late 1780s (Fumoleau, 1984).

Many Métis families in the North are descendents of the Dene and French-Métis traders who traveled north in the 17th and 18th centuries (Abel, 1993). There are also descendents of the Hudson's Bay Company personnel. Although, geographically, the NWT is vast, the population is relatively small, and many Aboriginal families are related. Overvold-Burger (1976) described the connection:

> For most Métis families in the present Northwest Territories, it would appear that the woman passed on to her children all that she knew of her own culture, and the man's influence though significant, played a secondary role in the emergent Métis way of life. This may account in part for the fact that the Métis lifestyle was very closely patterned after the Indian. (p. 95)

George Blondin (1997), Dene elder, acknowledged the history of the Métis in the NWT: "The Métis are a very important part of Denendeh history and dozens of family names

like Beaulieu, Mandeville, Lafferty and Mercredi live on" (p. 32). The early NWT Métis were skillful in many aspects of the commercial enterprise: trading, trapping, managing the post, working on boat brigades, and laboring. Other Métis families were established when individuals moved north seeking employment, married Aboriginals, and settled there. The largest concentration of Métis are in Fort Smith, Hay River, Yellowknife, and Inuvik.

Métis and Dene share a common connection to traditions and the land. This connection distinguishes most northern Métis from prairie Métis, who trace their roots to the Red River area and relate to specific events such as the North-West resistances of 1869, 1870, and 1885. These specific events supported their political development and identity formation (Devine, 1998). Northern ethnic identity is a complex situation in which diverse cultures are connected. Social and economic roles, language, spirituality, and people are finely interwoven, fostered by isolation and interdependence.

It was not until 1899 that definite ethnic classifications were imposed upon the people. Treaty 8 was negotiated, and "Half-breeds" scrip was issued. In 1921 Treaty 11 was introduced, as were cash payments to the "Half-breeds." These federal policies did not take into consideration the special circumstances or close relationships of the Northern people. Treaty Indians were now entitled to special rights that the Métis were not. Despite this, their ties have remained strong within most of the communities and regions.

For several years I worked in a northern Métis community, in which the school population reflected the community population. Aboriginal children were classified as being Treaty, Métis, or Inuit. In 1985 the Indian act was amended, and Bill C-31 allowed for the reinstatement of many Treaty status. People who were originally classified as Métis accepted Treaty status. Currently, there are ongoing debates in the NWT about who is Métis and who is not. Facilitating the land-claims process in one region involved the classification of Indigenous Métis and non-Indigenous Métis. I became very interested in

the issue of identity and how it influenced education among Métis students. To further warrant this research, I realized that most research in Aboriginal communities was being done on First Nations or band schools, and very little or none on northern Métis. The Métis Nation of the NWT has made education a priority. A report prepared for the Métis Nation in 1998 listed postsecondary education as the priority issue; specifically, the low number of students completing postsecondary education.

Personal Connection

> One thing I want to say about research is that there is a motive. I believe the reason is emotional because we feel. We feel because we are hungry, cold, afraid, brave, loving or hateful. We do what we do for reasons. That is the engine that drives us . That is the gift of the Creator of life. Life feels. We do our research as abstract and intellectual as it may be, whether it is a computer simulation of the random reinforcement effect on two category concept identification or not, we do what we do for emotional reasons. Feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise and suppress that feeling at our peril and at the peril of those around us. (Hampton, 1995, p. 52)

I am an Aboriginal woman from the NWT. My mother was Gwich'in, my father Métis-Cree. My grounding is in the Mackenzie Delta, where I was born and raised. My extended family in the North is Gwich'in, a people resourceful and innovative who have thrived in an environment many consider to be harsh and desolate. I consider my homeland to be magnificent, consisting of thousands of square kilometers abundant with caribou, moose, small game birds, and fish. Within the tundra are mountains, rivers, lakes, and streams. Most of my years growing up were spent in Inuvik, a community established by the government in the 1950s as an administrative center in the western Arctic. The people with whom I associated were all native to the area. Differences were never noted or considered; everyone lived in the same type of housing, ate the same traditional foods, and took part in the same activities. My mother had a definite culture and language, with which I was familiar. I knew my extended family—grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins—as well as other community members who were not directly

related. I had always felt a strong sense of belonging, of place, of acceptance. Although I have not lived there for many years, I still refer to it as *home*.

At the age of six I entered first grade. At that time, students were classified by ethnicity. If you did not fit into the category of *Eskimo* or *Indian*, you were classified as *Other*. That information was memorized. When questioned about my background in school, I would respond that I was an *Other*. Had I not been in my home, my place, this classification, which in *Webster's Dictionary* is defined as "being the one (as of two or more) remaining or not included, would certainly have had a detrimental impact. Occasionally, I would hear the term *Half-breed*, which did not have a lot of meaning for me. During the 1970s I first heard the term *Métis*. It was then that I became classified as Métis; the identity which was imposed on me was based on the fact that my mother, who was Treaty, had married someone who did not have Treaty rights. Later in life, Bill C-31 enabled me to reclaim the Treaty status that was taken from my mother. My ethnicity classification at the University of Alberta lists me as *Bill C-31*.

Purpose and Objectives

The fundamental purpose of this thesis is to examine the narratives and experiences of successful northern Métis students in order to identify and document some of the key factors and influences that contribute to their educational achievement. The primary issue underlying this study is the academic and personal success of northern Métis students in postsecondary institutions. This thesis will focus upon the following objectives:

- to identify instances of Aboriginal educational "success" and factors that influence achievement;
- to develop a process for the sharing of a unique body of information about the educational experiences of selected Métis students from the NWT, moving to southern Canada; and

- to draw some implications for school policies and practice and for Aboriginal organizations and communities seeking control of education in their communities

History of Formal Education in the Northwest Territories

Although this thesis is focused on positives and successes, it is not possible to provide a summary without discussing the initial purposes of early educators or attempting to understand the experiences of Aboriginal people of past generations. Kawagley (1995) pointed out that education (modernity) has brought not only negative consequences for Indigenous peoples, but also benefits: The infant mortality rate is down, as are childhood diseases; fluctuations in food supplies have been reduced. However, the benefits to traditional societies are often offset by the many new psychosocial and physical health ailments, problems of costly and inefficient housing, disruptions in parent-child relationships, domestic violence, suicides, alcohol and drug abuse, and other forms of dysfunctional behavior. With the vast changes has come a general sense of powerlessness and loss of control over individual lives.

Hookimaw-Witt (1998) drew our attention to the fact that education itself has not helped the existing social problems, but has actually created them. She explained that besides the physical and emotional abuse in residential schools, there was also an "onslaught on our culture and identity through the content taught in schools and the way it was taught" (p. 166). Education or modernity may have benefited Indigenous people, but the negative ramifications are still evident in today's society. Thousands of Aboriginal adults today are forever marked by the traumatic experiences forced upon them by the residential school system.

The experiences of Northern Aboriginal people with formal educational institutions are similar to those of Indigenous peoples throughout Canada. Assimilation became official policy during Sir John A. MacDonald's first term. He informed

Parliament that a national goal was to "do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the dominion, as speedily as they are fit to change" (Milloy, 1999, p. 7). Indians were to adopt a settled life and become involved in agriculture, trades, manufacturing, and the Christian religion. Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, viewed education as the most critical element of the assimilative strategy. With the assistance of the churches, the State set out to eradicate the nativeness, spirituality, traditions, culture, and language and to "make [the Aboriginal] a self-supporting member of the state and eventually a citizen in good standing" (Milloy, 1999, p. 1).

A log school at Fort Simpson, built in 1860-61 by the Reverend William Kirby of the Anglican Church, is the first record of a school built in the NWT. On October 7, 1867, the Grey Nuns of Montreal opened the first residential school (Macpherson, 1991). As one sister ethnocentrically explained, the children received instruction in Christian beliefs and morality:

> Our little mission on the MacKenzie has worked since the beginning of its foundation to raise people in all innocence and to lead them. . . ultimately to form all-Christian families who will maintain civilization and above all, the faith. . . Future generations might produce vocations for the priesthood or religious life; what is important at the moment is to develop good mothers who understand the obligations of their position. All our care and all our efforts are directed at this vitally important goal. (Macpherson, 1991, p. 118)

Moving into the NWT, the Roman Catholic and Anglican missionaries and priests competed with each other for the souls of the people along the MacKenzie River. In 1894 two schools were opened by the representatives of the Anglican church in Hay River and on Baffin Island. Father Turquetil established a Roman Catholic Mission in Chesterfield Inlet, and the Grey Nuns from Montreal established St. Joseph's Residential School at Fort Resolution in 1902. The Roman Catholic Church opened the Mary Immaculate School in Aklavik in 1926 (Macpherson, 1991). The churches built schools and took in students. Officials then claimed that "such schools defied logic because no thought was

being given to what sort of education [was] to be imparted and how this education [could] be useful to people in the after life" (Milloy, 1999, p. 40).

Throughout the years of educational development, there was very little balance between cultural preservation and "modernization." The curriculum became a direct form of assimilation. The residential school, where many were educated, was also a place that inflicted great cultural, personal, and community pain by removing children from their homes for great lengths of time. As late as 1997, a shocking testimony from an individual revealed that several young men had been sexually assaulted in the Grollier Hall Residence in Inuvik from 1967 to 1979 by a former supervisor (Pushkarenko, 1998). The acts of this one supervisor have tragically affected many individuals, families, and communities throughout the North.

In 1970 the schools came under the jurisdiction of the Territorial Department of Education. Currently, the Department of Education, Culture, and Employment of the Government of the NWT is responsible for administering educational programs and funding for kindergarten through postsecondary. The regions have in place a district education authority, headed by a superintendent, then a supervisor of schools, and, finally, principals and vice-principals in most communities. Each community has its own elected board.

The Department of Education in the NWT has historically hired non-Aboriginal teachers from southern Canada to teach in the North. Although a few communities have required that teachers be familiar with the culture of the people in the North, most non-Aboriginal teachers have had no experience in Aboriginal communities, resulting in problems: Teachers were not familiar with the Aboriginal languages or the nuances of the various cultures; many received their training to teach in the south; they were not aware of distinctive learning styles and did not recognize cultural knowledge. Jim Martin (1990), Director of the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education, in a teacher-education document described the situation:

> Northern communities have to rely on largely transient teachers to educate their children. The cultural difference between the largely White, urban teachers and the rural, native teachers has been immense, and unfortunately has remained largely unabridged. Few things have been more alien in the lives of northern children than schooling as it has often been delivered. Southern trained teachers have frequently had a southern urban focus that has been irrelevant to the lives of northern students. Unaware of the intricate and often fragile elements that sustain native communities, their prominent positions within the schools has ensured that their beliefs and methods prevailed. However the children (and frequently the parents through the children) resisted the system through lateness, inattention, poor attendance, and the innumerable "inexplicable" barriers to learning (White ways) which paradoxically have been small, negative successes for their ways. (p. 7)

I found it difficult to understand why many teachers would consider moving to the North without attempting to learn about the Aboriginal people, their history, or their culture. I once heard a non-Aboriginal teacher say something to the effect of "I love children. I just teach; . . . I don't see color or race. . . . I just teach; that's what I do." What a sad statement. In my opinion, this teacher had failed to recognize the richness of the various cultures of the North and the knowledge that the children may have brought with them. Further, I doubted that this individual had ever considered learning about the history of the region and teaching the Aboriginal children that they did, indeed, have much of which to be proud in their land, their grandparents, and their great-grandparents. Contenta (1993), in discussing Black segregated bussing in Nova Scotia stated:

> The attitude they get from most teachers is, "I don't see Black, I don't see White, I only see students," Blindness to Nova Scotia's racial differences is not, for most teachers an exercise in egalitarianism . . . To admit the existence of cultural differences would be a threat to their curriculum and teaching methods. (p. 85)

Codjoe (1997), also cautioned concern with this attitude, explaining that teachers who have the "colour blind" approach often hold biased views and stereotypical expectations of different groups. He cited Banks and Banks who pointed out, "Many teachers are unaware of the extent to which they embrace racist and sexist attitudes and behaviours that are institutionalized within society" (p. 188).

I have never forgotten a statement made by another non-Aboriginal teacher: "I think I'm more traditional than most Aboriginal people now. I spend more time on the land camping and hunting." In my opinion, this individual could not possibly understand the quiet nuances of the cultures, the beauty of Aboriginal languages, or the teachings of traditional grandparents. This individual could not possibly understand what it felt like to be taken from home at an early age and have lived in a residential school, nor what it felt like to be told not to speak his language or to practice any part of his culture. Incidents such as these are not rare occurrences. They verify to me that there are still ignorance, misunderstandings, and a lack of insight into Aboriginal societies and their worth.

In 1991 the Minister of Education of the NWT, Stephen Kakfwi, set a goal of 50% Aboriginal teachers by the year 2000. Although this goal has not been met, the number of Aboriginal teachers in the North has increased. Also increased is the severity of issues facing the teachers.

Terminology

I have chosen to use the term *Aboriginal* to refer to the Dene and Métis of the NWT purely for personal reasons. The unique relationship between these two nations must be acknowledged. References to Aboriginal people are specific to people of Dene descent and Métis -Cree in the Canadian Northwest Territories and do not apply categorically to all Aboriginal people.

Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study is limited by the vast distances between communities in the NWT and the various locations across Canada and the United States in which the students are studying. It is limited also by the fact that I selected only four participants and did not include the perspectives of their parents, siblings, teachers, or community members. The data gathered were extensive, and I was unable to use all of the information I gathered from my research.

Another limitation is the literature which was available. Much of it was American and pertained to Black people. The literature on successes of Aboriginal students in Canada was very limited. Most literature focused on the underachievement of minority students. Literature that was available focused on First Nations students, and there was very little on Métis students, specifically. Further to this, most literature concerning education in the Northwest Territories has not been written by Aboriginal people.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Achievement

> Persons of Aboriginal ancestry have significantly lower overall rates of educational attainment and are much less likely to attend and complete post-secondary studies than other Canadians. (Wotherspoon, 1998, p. 169)

In today's society there is a tendency to equate achievement with human worth. In effect, people are held to be only as good as their achievements. To *achieve*, according to the *Oxford Modern English Dictionary* (1992), is to reach or gain by effort (achieved victory) or to acquire, gain, or earn (achieved notoriety). Achievement in education becomes academic achievement. Academic achievement is usually measured through the utilization of standardized tests and student evaluations. These evaluations are often summarized in a report card or, in postsecondary education, in an academic transcript. Academic achievement is often linked to ability, comprehension, knowledge, or intelligence.

Common and Frost (1988) discussed Samuel Morton who, in the mid 1800s attempted to assess Native intelligence by measuring the volume in cubic inches of the skulls of 144 American Indians. He applied this technique to collections of skulls of people from different cultural groups, the assumption being that the volume of a skull was a direct measure of the intellectual capacity of the brain which it held. By Morton's account, Natives rated second from last.

Further studies revealed the same simplistic line of thinking. Common and Frost (1988) also examined another study by Mcshane, Risse and Ruben which suggested that the shape of the head related to the complex functions of the brain. Not only did studies such as this display an ethnocentric, biased attitude, but the assumption also discounted over a hundred years of cognitive science and neuropsychology studies to the

understanding on brain function. Philosophers and scholars have long debated *scientific evidence* demonstrating the existence of differences in intelligence among social classes and races (Hernstein & Murray, 1994). Genetics, socioeconomic status, and IQ are often cited to extenuate the issue of difference in academic success among cultures. This type of research denigrates minority populations. The socioeconomic status of one's parents cannot *cause* one's IQ to be high or low. Furthermore, these types of assertions fail to recognize the causes of underachievement.

In searching the literature on academic achievement at the University of Alberta's education library, I found a listing of 479 titles. The issues within this collection ranged from strategies for motivation (Bernard, 1977) and effects of various factors on school achievement (Chatterjee, 1983), to birth order, parental interests, and teacher characteristics (Green, 1978). The literature at this library also included studies on various cultures and countries: Britain, Indonesia, Japan, Italy, and the Caribbean. The majority of listings were American. Canadian minority studies were not identified as Indian, Aboriginal, or Native in title. I was dismayed to find that in this year (2000) certain biased attitudes still existed; for example, *The Association of Income and Educational Achievement* (Lassiter, 1966) and *School Performance of Children in Families Receiving Public Assistance in Canada* (Malik, 1966). These publications are outdated and rely on low socioeconomic status as a cause of failure.

Overall, the majority of the literature referred to Blacks and other ethnic minorities in the United States. There is literature on Indian people and education, however, but little on Métis people specifically. An emphasis on underachievement or academic failure and Aboriginal people is exemplified in the literature and general media. This emphasis is reinforced in the minds of educators and potential educators, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Delpit (1995) discussed "how, because of this subliminal image, the power and imbalance and cultural conflicts occur within a larger society that nurtures and maintains stereotypes" (p. xii).

The general media portray Aboriginal people in a very negative light—for example, protests or roadblocks as in Oka in 1993 and Nova Scotia in 1999—and almost daily the news media across Canada announce details regarding Aboriginal people and crime, shootings, suicides, and incarcerations. The negative image is powerful. How often are Aboriginal authors, scholars, or researchers seen on television? (Delpit, 1995).

Standardized Testing

> The underachievement patterns of American Indian children is an issue that deserves much research attention. Educational failures within this group is alarmingly high and at present largely unexplained. The overall average scores of Indian children on tests of intelligence and psycholinguistic skills mask the unique patterns of abilities that are characteristic of Indian children. Further attempts to relate these abilities to educational achievement is timely and necessary. (McShane & Plas, 1988, p. 78)

IQ measures such as the WISC-R assess the knowledge and intelligence of all children. These tests assess knowledge which is generally acquired in the average experience of the non-Aboriginal child, but they cannot possibly measure the knowledge acquired by the majority of Aboriginal children. Emerson (1987) suggested that

> the general low academic performance scores and achievement level characterizes the educational problems of the Native American student despite the fact that such performance scores are for the most part discriminatory to the culturally different native student when issues of cultural and language biases are considered. (p. 243)

The consistent pattern of findings shown by such test results indicates that Aboriginal students do not perform as well as non-Aboriginal students. Emerson also cites Wilgosh, Mulcahy, and Walters (1986), who reported the assessment, using the WISC-R, of 366 Inuit children randomly selected from two districts in the NWT. A Verbal Scale score of less than 70 was obtained for 77.4% of the children in the study. The percentage of children scoring below 70 on the Performance Scale was 5.74%. The resulting Full Scale IQ scores indicated that 32.24% of the children in the sample scored below 70 and,

according to the test norms, would be classified as mentally retarded. The report concluded that the WISC-R is not appropriate for the assessment of Inuit children.

Success—On Whose Terms?

Regardless of the difficulties and differences, Aboriginal people must be able to function successfully within the dominant White culture. This should not reduce the significance of cultural knowledge, skills, values, history, or world view; yet it does. Dene ancestors and Elders have gained knowledge, insight into, and perceptions of life in the NWT land as they knew it. Although much of the knowledge may not be used in practice, there are still many Aboriginal people closely connected to the land where much of this knowledge is gained. The very fact that we are Aboriginal means that we have inherent knowledge. Wilson (1995), who spoke at the First Biannual Indigenous Scholar's Conference, supported Elder Lionel Kinewa, who spoke of this knowledge:

> We have memories. Our ancestral memories are in your blood, they're in your muscles, they're in your bones, they're in your hair, and those memories are there. He said that too many of us do not pay attention to these memories because we are too busy paying attention to what's going on in the modern world. We don't pay attention to our historic memory. That is why when we hear the drum, our spirit is moved. This is because the vibrations of the drum stir old memories-our ancestral memories. These memories come out of the molecular structure of our being. (p. 65)

There is little written information on the traditional acquisition of knowledge. Each culture had its own ways of teaching and learning. From my experience, traditionally verbal skills were not as highly valued, except possibly among story tellers. Children developed certain "intellectual" styles through observation and imitation. There was a great deal of nonverbal communication. Today, standardized tests and intelligence measures rely heavily on our language proficiency. Sternberg (1988) addressed cultural views on intelligence:

> Not all cultures view intelligence in the same way or consider the same behaviors to be intelligent. Intelligence is essentially a cultural intention to account for the fact that some people are able to succeed in their environment better than others on the tasks that culture happens to value. (pp. 46-48)

The purpose here is not to argue that we need to go back to traditional education; however, there is a definite lack of Aboriginal knowledge in our schools. I do not think that this is an oversight. What is considered to be "legitimate knowledge" does not include Aboriginal knowledge. I believe its absence makes a statement of its own. In the Northwest Territories, Dene Kede, a curriculum with a Dene perspective, has been developed by Aboriginal educators and elders. The format is pleasing, and the content includes the perspectives of all Dene groups across the North. However, this document is not viewed as "required" curriculum by the Department of Education; rather, it is meant to be interpreted by the teacher and community to meet their needs.

There is recent evidence of more Aboriginal people enrolled in postsecondary institutions than ever before, indicating that, in spite of the obstacles and barriers, many resilient, high-achieving students are of Aboriginal origin. My personal description of *success* became "one who is academically successful and maintains cultural and historical perspective."

Minority Education

The White middle-class population is generally considered to be the dominant culture, connected historically and culturally to Europe. This population is not homogenous but may include "autonomous minorities" (Ogbu, 1993, p. 92), groups which are similar in appearance (e.g., Jews, Mormons), but are culturally different.

Ogbu (1978) classified three minority types—autonomous minorities, voluntary or immigrant minorities, and castelike or involuntary minorities—who do not necessarily experience the same learning difficulties that other minorities do; however, they still may

face the same discrimination and prejudice. Ogbu (1993) claimed that their "cultural frame of reference demonstrates and encourages academic success" (p. 92).

Asian people in the United States are examples of voluntary minorities (Ogbu, 1993). These groups have voluntarily moved to the United States with the belief that there would be greater economic opportunities for them there. He stated that although they may experience "difficulties due to language and cultural differences, they do not experience lingering disproportionate school failure" (p. 62). Chan and Hune (1995; as cited in Codjoe, 1997) stated that:

> The overemphasis on Asian success is a way for the dominant society to divest itself of responsibility for addressing the barriers that maintain racial and social inequality and, as a consequence, discussions of economic and educational achievement continue to be racialized rather than focusing on the institutional barriers that inhibit the advancement of minorities. (p. 6)

Lee (1996) stated:

> In all of its permutations, the model minority of stereotype has been used to support the status quo and the ideologies of meritocracy and individualism. Supporters of the model minority stereotype use Asian American success to delegitimize claims of inequality made by other racial minorities. According to the model minority discourse, Asian Americans prove that social mobility is possible for all those who are willing to work. Asian Americans are represented as examples of upward mobility through individual effort. (p. 8)

Lee further stated that the "model minority" type is dangerous because it tells Asian Americans and other minorities how to behave. This stereotype, she felt, is dangerous because it is used against other minority groups to silence their claims of inequality, and it silences the experiences of Asian Americans who do not achieve model minority success. And finally, she claimed that the stereotype is dangerous because some Asian Americans may use it to judge their self-worth; and when this happens "we/they may just lose your identity . . . lose being yourself" (p. 125).

Native Hawaiians, American Indians, and Black Americans are examples of what Ogbu (1993) referred to as castelike or involuntary minorities. These groups have

become minorities because they were brought to the United States as slaves, were conquered in war, or were colonized. As a result, they were "relegated to menial positions and denied true assimilation into mainstream society" (p. 92). These involuntary minority groups, Ogbu felt, have the most problems with social adjustment and achievement. He explained that involuntary minorities tend to be less prepared by their families to compete for desirable positions and jobs in society and feared that social barriers have confined them to the lowest jobs. Involuntary minorities also learn to become cynical and, because they believe they will be confined to lower jobs, they see no need to follow practices that are conducive to academic achievement.

Although I am compelled to agree with segments of Ogbu's (1993) theory, I cannot totally accept it. There are factors which affect and influence the education of minorities; teachers' cultural ignorance, teachers' expectations of minorities, history of colonization, views of "success" and means of evaluating academic success, curriculum relevance, tracking (the practice of dividing students into separate classes for high, average, and low achievers) all are significant factors in students' achieving academic success.

Systematic anthropological study of minority education began mainly in the mid 1960s. Cultural deprivation was thought to be the reason that minority students were failing in school (Ogbu, 1993), and anthropologists attempted to refute this notion. Jacob and Jordan (1993) cited Deutch and Reissman , who discussed the *cultural deficit* theory which rationalizes student failure as resulting from the home environment of the child. It assumes that the child who does not "benefit" from the material goods supply and lifestyle of the dominant society is underprivileged. This position has been rejected, as Jacob and Jordan pointed out, because it tends to reflect on ethnocentric positions that nonstandard speech patterns and work habits are somehow inferior to those of the majority culture (pp. 4-5).

The cultural difference theory developed by Erickson (1993) considers different patterns of language, behavior, and so forth as being simply different; not better, not worse. He argued that "differences between majority and minority cultures in interaction, linguistic and cognitive styles lead to conflicts between school and child that interfere with effective education" (p. 8). The cultural difference theory assumes that each culture is equal, although different from other cultures.

The various theories and ideologies regarding minorities and academic achievement or intelligence have shifted over the years. In many respects, theories are still being defined by the dominant society in regard to education. The majority population in the NWT in the past has been Aboriginal; however, our education system, until recently, has not reflected this. Although we are in our own land and make up the majority of the permanent population, it appears that we are still the minority. My purpose is not to lay blame, but to seek positive solutions. The Northwest Territories has recently divided into two territories. The population is fairly even between the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal. It is still our homeland. We still have the right to teach our children about their culture, traditions, and traditional knowledge within the field of education. From my experience, most Aboriginal parents want their children to achieve academically. Teaching children about themselves, their ancestors, and their history would instill a stronger sense of character, identity, and belonging. Intelligence does not have to be redefined, but the definition can be enhanced as we recognize what our own people deemed intelligence to be in the past.

It is also imperative that we Aboriginal educators and leaders look within for the answers. The funding that is going into the system is phenomenal. The schools continue to absorb the dysfunctions that are manifested in our society. Continuing to pour more and more dollars into the system to relieve tension is a temporary solution, because in a few years the need will be there again. There is no long-term vision or plan in place for Aboriginal students. Yes, we all want them to succeed. If the current system is not

working for the majority of the students, we need to look at what is working for the students who are breaking down the barriers and learn from them, as well as to trust our own knowledge.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

For this study, I have listened to the stories of selected Métis students from across the NWT who have experienced academic success in the northern educational system as well as in postsecondary institutions in southern Canada and the United States. Through ethnographic interviews, the participants have shared their perspectives of their personal educational journeys from their elementary school years to their years in higher education. My personal knowledge of research among Aboriginal cultures in the past as well as my experience in an *Indigenous Research Methodologies* course in graduate studies have fostered my use of a natural method of research, ethnography. Seeking knowledge in my own community, *process*—that is, methodology and method—was highly important. The process needed to be respectful, enabling, and credible.

Qualitative Research

> [Qualitative research] is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counter-disciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and social and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multi-pragmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multi- method approach. They are committed to the naturalist perspective, and to the interpretive understanding of the human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions. Qualitative research embraces two tensions at the same time. On the one hand, it is drawn to a broad, interpretive, postmodern, feminist and critical sensibility. On the other hand, it is drawn to more narrowly define positivist, post-positivist, humanistic, and naturalistic conceptions of human experience and analysis. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 3-4)

Qualitative research is an umbrella term which embraces a number of distinctive research methodologies, one of which is *ethnography.* Qualitative methodology is briefly

examined here to clarify where ethnography and ethnographic research methods fit into the overall framework.

In recent years the use of qualitative methodology as a research tool in the social sciences has grown. A qualitative research method refers to those research strategies that allow the researcher to acquire firsthand knowledge of a social situation. In-depth interviewing, participant observation, and oral history are strategies of this method. Maxwell (1996) stated, "The strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (pp. 17-20) The purposes of utilizing qualitative studies in research generally include:

1. to understand the meaning, the participants perspectives of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with and of the accounts they give of their lives and experiences.
2. to understand the particular *context* within which the participants act, and the influence this context has on their actions.
3. to identify *unanticipated* phenomena and influences-exploratory qualitative studies.
4. to understand *process* by which events and actions take place.
5. to develop causal explanations. (pp. 17-20)

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) added to the description of qualitative research by stating that it

> crosscuts disciplines, fields and subject matter; it is used in education, social work, communications, psychology, history, organizational studies, medical sciences, anthropology and sociology and there are patterns which have emerged in the development of qualitative research during the twentieth century. (p. 2)

Ethnography as a Qualitative Method

Ethnography is commonly referred to as *naturalistic research, naturalistic inquiry,* or *field research* because of the naturalistic settings of the studies. The term *naturalistic* setting refers to the fact that the variables being investigated are studied as they naturally occur, where they naturally occur, and not in a controlled environment

under controlled conditions. There tends to be varying descriptions, as Hammersly (1990) noted:

> The term "ethnography" is not clearly defined in common usage, and there is some disagreement about what count and do not count as examples of it. Furthermore, the meaning of the term overlaps with that of several others, such as 'qualitative method,' 'interpretive research,' 'case study,' 'participant observation,' 'life history method,' 'ethnogenics,' etc. and these two terms are not used in very precisely defined ways either. (p. 1)

Anthropologists have varying descriptions of ethnography, ranging from Spradley's (1979) description, "Ethnography is the work of describing a culture" (p. 3), to Fraenkel and Wallen's description, which states that ethnographic study involves "documenting or portraying the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them and relevant others" (p. 12). Wolcott (1994) referred to ethnography as both a process and a product, the actual ethnographic account. Erickson (1977) described what he believed it is not, which is a reporting process guided by a specific set of techniques. He went on to describe it as an inquiry process, guided by a point of view that derives from experience in the research setting and from the knowledge of prior anthropological research.

Anthropologists first applied ethnographic methods to investigate educational problems. Persons with more traditional, hypothesis-testing oriented backgrounds gradually used this method more. Rist (as cited in Gay, 1987) described this shift:

> Finally, there is the matter of how to employ this method. The traditional assumption was that the single individual (sometimes a couple) would go to the field site, became enmeshed in the life of that site, and only after a long and involved period of time, begin to form a framework for the analysis. Theory was "grounded" in experience. Recently there are several examples in which the number of ethnographers has been one or two, but upwards of 60 working on a single study. The conventional single site case study has been contemplated by a multisite approach frequently used in policy analysis. Furthermore, the idea of going into the field and allowing the issues and problems to emerge from extensive time on site has also given way to the performulation of research problems, to the specifying of precise activities that are to be observed, and to the analytical framework within which the study is to be conducted. And all of this is

> prior to the *first* site visit. The end result is a structured and predetermined approach to data collection and analysis. (p. 211)

I believe that this research method is most naturally applicable to Aboriginal researchers working within their own communities. Much of the groundwork, worldview, language, and cultural nuances are understood and established. I believe the essence of ethnography is preparation, learning, understanding, analysis, and accounting as the process develops. The variation of individual researchers' cultures, characteristics, personalities, visions, and desired outcomes will influence both the process and the product. The same study could have been done by several researchers and the results could have been different each time. As an insider, I was familiar with the North, the people, and the educational system from an Aboriginal perspective. There was a connection between the participants and myself.

Narrative Inquiry

Guided by the ethnographic tool of *interviews,* I attempted to seek out narratives from the participants in this study. Coming from an Aboriginal society and working within my own community, I deemed narrative inquiry to be the most natural and appropriate method of research. It was also a way to weave my own story in throughout the discussions. Traditionally, Aboriginal societies have been oral societies. Through the telling of stories, knowledge was communicated. Stories could be told in ways that were complex and filled with layers of meaning. Gatherings were often centered around storytellers who passed on stories of history, of wars, of hunts, of tragedies, and of courage. Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) emphasized: "The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people an the people with the story" (p. 145).

Connelly and Clandidin (1990) defined narrative as

> a temporal past, present and future, and, as in all storytelling, . . . a reconstruction of experience. It is putting of 'the mind in the body' and the body in the mind.' The whole, for us, is the narrative that each person tells of herself/himself; or that is told through process of inquiry. . . . In narrative inquiry, there are multiple possible narratives and/or narrative threads and the judgement of whether or not one is 'telling the truth' has to do with criteria such as adequacy, possibility, depth, and sense of integrity. (p. 245)

Codjoe (1997) referred to Ayers' suggestion that there are three ways in which narrative inquiry can contribute to a greater understanding of the 'out-of-school curriculum':

> First, "it may challenge educators to know more about the perspectives being fashioned in [students'] lives and in their own worlds. It may cause policy makers to reflect seriously on the social changes that have affected children." Second, "the process of life-history, of creating an autobiography, can be a powerful, transformative experience because it is in a small way an act of self- discovery and self creation. In this self-creation, this act of meaning-making, people are often surprised by their own memories, actions, and goals, and find that surprise becomes the occasion to change directions, to redouble efforts, to surpass themselves." And third, "[it would] allow educators to uncover and examine their own assumptions about school, about teaching, as they view things through the lens of these particular students." (p. 127)

Traditional Native storytellers were held in high esteem. Elders, often the teachers in a community, were often regarded as 'carriers of the history.' They were greatly respected, not only for their experience and wisdom, but also for their ability to remember and recite stories of the past. Profeit-Leblanc (1993) described Aboriginal storytelling:

> She could remember, the young girl had been filled with many stories from her grandmother. Stories from the ancient past. Stories from another time, another world of existence. Stories of great courage, of transformation and trickery. Stories of great tragedies and struggles. Stories of grief and loss and resilience of a people who survived one of the most difficult environments for existence. Tales of wit and humour. . . . Her classroom was the smokehouse and the curriculum being taught was life. She was being prepared for the future. Her mind was being taught to think on all levels and trained to understand things mentally but also emotionally and spiritually. Each concept of the story was being heard by her heart. She remembered sharing this phenomenon with her friends and they always tried to go to her Grandma's place to hear the stories. They also liked the fact that

> each of them understood the story how they were Meant to understand it. No one was marked wrong in this classroom! (pp. xciii-xxv)

Within the Aboriginal communities of the North, the tradition of storytelling has carried on. Elders are often invited into classrooms and to cultural camps and field trips to share stories and legends which are being used to teach the Dene curriculum. Political and social gatherings often include many hours of sharing of experiences, visions, and dreams. Story telling or sharing difficult experiences is used as a method of healing in many Aboriginal communities across Canada. Stories of tragedy and triumph are related as individuals struggle to overcome a variety of issues. Close families, extended families, and acquaintances often come together for a time of 'catching up' on each other's lives through the sharing of stories. From experience, I have been aware that most people would be more comfortable relating various life stories than focusing on specific questions which intend to suggest perimeters or limitations.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were given precise and thorough information on the nature of the research project. Participation was strictly voluntary, and individuals were given the right to withdraw at any time. This information was explained in discussion as well as on a written consent form. The participants were aware that the data collected would be used for this research project only and were given the opportunity to ask questions at any time.

To provide anonymity, pseudonyms were used. What we (participants and researcher) understood was that the northern 'community' was a very small community and that their accomplishments were well known.

The university required completion of an ethics review application form, which was approved. Interviews were audiotaped. Prior to each discussion or new tape, verbal permission was granted. The tapes will be destroyed once the data are analyzed.

Data Collection

I made three trips to communities in the NWT to conduct interviews. With three of the participants I conducted in-depth interviews. It was not possible to meet the fourth participant personally, so I conducted two telephone interviews. I have also had follow-up discussions to clarify specific information.

To assist my process, I prepared a study guide. My questions were arranged in themes in which I would ask the participants, "Tell me about your community" or "Tell me about your elementary school years." As much as possible, the themes followed chronological order. I have used subheadings to ensure that certain topics have been covered. Each participant had ample opportunity to introduce new themes that were related to the research question.

I indicated involvement in the question by sharing information along the way so that the discussions did not seem distant and one-sided. Immediately into the first interview it seemed natural to add to the discussion, and I felt that this eased the process, both for the participant and for me. The interviews were held in Métis Nation local offices during the evenings or on weekends, when there were no interruptions. This seemed to be a convenient and comfortable setting for all of us.

Method and Criteria for Selection of Participants

As I have explained, geographically, the NWT is a vast region; in a 'community' sense, it is not. To describe it in a physical sense would be to acknowledge the actual locality and area. I personally know many people from the Mackenzie Delta to the South Slave region. For many Aboriginal people, it would be a rare occurrence to walk down any street/road in any community and not meet someone they know. I feel connected to a number of Aboriginal communities both in the North and the South, just as Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) took the description of community further: "The idea of community is

defined or imagined in multiple ways, as physical, political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic and cultural spaces" (125).

Having an interest and being involved in the education field for many years has kept me abreast of those who were focusing on higher education in the south. I was aware of the many older students who had returned to postsecondary institutions to fulfill their educational goals. My interest was the factors that enable younger students to succeed. This interest was a result of witnessing many students who were not completing high school, some of whom had dropped out in elementary school.

I contacted Métis offices in all the communities that had organizations, described the nature of my study, and requested the names of possible participants. From the potential participants who I knew personally and the lists presented to me, I selected four participants. I believe that they represented various dimensions of the diversity within the Aboriginal community in the NWT. A geographic range was covered as much as possible. All were born and raised there and represent various regions and Dene backgrounds. Some of the students had lived in smaller communities, others in larger centers. One-parent and two-parent families were represented. The major criteria for choosing these students were their Aboriginality and academic success. Although there may be disagreements about what it means to be successful, the participants appeared to have positive self-images, and most had completed more than one university degree. During initial telephone contacts they appeared enthusiastic and proud of their accomplishments and very willing to share their stories.

One participant has a degree in both wildlife science and business management and marketing and is currently working on a doctoral degree in resource economics. Another has a Bachelor of Native Studies degree and is currently working on a second degree in environmental science. A third participant has completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Bachelor of Law degree, and the fourth participant is currently working on a

medical degree. All are under the age of 30 years and have attended postsecondary institutions across Canada and the United States.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the presentation of the data; stories serve as the primary source. The individuals related their stories in a variety of ways; most openly shared with little hesitation. Although there were variations in personalities, history of families, communities, and experiences, responses and concerns comprised common themes. I have drawn my conclusions from the themes that have emerged from analyzing the stories. An interesting note is that three of the four participants expressed concern about the possibility of "hurting the feelings of educators in the North." It became obvious that they had witnessed or were involved in acts of unfairness or racism which were attributed to the views and perceptions of non-Aboriginal teachers. Sharing these experiences was imperative; equally important was the continued respect of the participants for all individuals involved.

Participant Profiles

The participants selected for this study identified themselves as Métis. They are all from the Northwest Territories and are at varying stages in their postsecondary education. Two of the four individuals graduated from high school in the North, another attended two years of high school in Alberta, where he pursued a hockey career. The fourth participant graduated in a southern city, where his mother was attending university. An interesting fact is that three of the four participants are the youngest in families that consisted of four to six children.

Throughout the study the importance of family emerged. The participants stressed highly the influence of supportive parents and siblings in setting educational goals and in learning to be respectful of themselves and others. The majority of parents had not

received a high level of formal education; however, the participants recognized and highly regarded their parents' intelligence in many areas. With family support and the high expectations that the participants set for themselves, they were able to construct a strong sense of identity, competency, self-assuredness, and self-discipline. They also maintained humility, respect, and pride in their cultural background and their homeland, the Northwest Territories.

Amber

Amber was born and raised in a small community in the Northwest Territories. She is quiet and soft spoken with almost a hint of shyness. Her father and extended family were Aboriginal from the North, and her mother was non-Aboriginal. Her love for the North, the people, and the lifestyle is strong. Spending time 'on the land' camping, hunting, and fishing were favorite pastimes while growing up. Although currently pressed for time with studies and work, a future goal for this young lady is to spend more time on the land and to learn to hunt.

Currently, she was attending the University of Waterloo concentrating on a degree in environmental studies. She is 21 years old and holds a Native studies degree from the University of Saskatchewan. Her future goals are to work in the North, possibly working with the mining industry, to ensure that the exploration is done properly and responsibly and that the North is protected environmentally.

Dean

Dean was born and raised in a larger community. He was confident and proud of his Métis heritage. He spent his summers working in a smaller community in the North. He was raised by his mother, a single parent who went on to study psychology at university in the south. Dean was currently studying medicine at the University of Saskatchewan.

Brad

Brad was born and raised in the Northwest Territories until Grade 11. His mother and extended family in the North were Aboriginal; his father and extended family (also in the North) were non-Aboriginal. Both parents proudly displayed a traditional knowledge of hunting, fishing, and trapping and a love for the land and animals were passed on to Brad. Returning to the North to spend time on the land was a passion fulfilled whenever possible. Brad was energetic and outgoing. Pride and love for the North have always gave him a feeling of being special.

Brad moved to Alberta when he was in Grade 11 to play junior hockey. He excelled in this sport and eventually moved on to the United States, where he played two years of semiprofessional hockey with the Pittsburgh Penguins. After playing hockey for two years and not becoming a professional player, he decided to continue his education at Cornell University, from which he held a degree in science, with a duel major in natural resources and business management and marketing. He was currently working on a PhD degree in resource economics from the University of Alberta. Brad would like to contribute to the growth and development of the North someday with a doctoral degree in hand.

Janelle

Janelle was soft spoken and passionate about her family, heritage, education, work, and life in general. Her mother and extended family in the North are Aboriginal; her father is non-Aboriginal. She had lived in several communities in both the Northwest Territories and the Yukon Territory and considers her home to be a small community in the NWT where her extended family resided.

During her years growing up, she learned traditions and heard stories from her mother and spent time berry picking, hunting, fishing, and camping wherever they were.

This tie to the people and land remained strong, and future plans included learning to hunt as her mother did.

Janelle held a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in women's studies and a Bachelor of Law. She is currently working with a law firm in the Northwest Territories.

Themes

Family Support and Influence

> We believe that the Creator has entrusted us with the sacred responsibility to raise our families . . . for we realize healthy families are the foundation of strong and healthy communities. The future of the communities lies with our children, who need to be nurtured within their families and communities. (Morris, 1996)

A strong family network and support system were identified as the most significant factors in achieving academic success, which is not meant to portray an image of a perfect family. Some participants recognized that parents, aunts, uncles, and, in some cases, grandparents experienced difficulties with addictions, residential schools, and other forms of family dysfunction. For some, family members who overcame these barriers in life modeled strength, resilience, and pride to the younger generation.

> When I had my bar call, I acknowledged the reason I was there and who I am today is because of my family. They have always supported and encouraged me. They see things in me that I don't even see myself. (Janelle)

During the years that the participants spent growing up, the majority of their parents worked at jobs that took them away from the household; however the participants felt that when it mattered most (evenings and weekends), there was always someone at home. Amber recalled: "My parents never played bingo, dad hunted, mom sewed and they did things around the house. They did a lot of family stuff. My parents were always there."

Brad also remembered family activities when they went out on the land:

> In the summertime we always went to our cabin. That was one really nice thing I would like to pass on to my family. We'd take off as a whole group, to different rivers. We'd be together for at least ten days, and then there were different times we would do spring hunting or fall hunting. I thought that set a really good foundation for us being a close family. . . . just being alone.

Janelle recalled similar experiences:

> I loved the summers. My dad built this big boat; he called it a scow. My mom would take us out, we would pack a lunch and go out and play in the mud. We had a cabin across the river. I remember spending summers there, picking berries. We had a tipi, mostly we just played. My parents hunted and fished. We had a fish net. When my parents lived in Fort MacPherson my dad had a dog team.

The families' finances were not such that the participants felt privileged. They did not have large homes or material wealth as they were growing up. One mother stayed at home and sewed to earn extra income for her large family. The needs of the children always came first. As they grew older, the participants worked at odd jobs after school and during the summers. The attitude toward finances varied; in the two-parent families in which the mothers are Aboriginal, the fathers seemed to plan and save. This was not a priority of the mothers, who shared all they had. Janelle commented on her mother's values:

> She will never be a rich woman because as soon as she gets anything she gives it to her kids, her grandchildren, her sisters and her brothers. I probably learned budgeting skills from my dad; he was always like that. My mom was more likely to give her money away to people who needed it. At that point it's a bit of a thing between my mom and my dad, because my dad wasn't raised that way. For my mom, she doesn't care if she has anything in her house or anything like that.

Brad reported much the same:

> I'm thirty years old now, and Mom is still trying to slip me money. You know, I think that happened from when she was a kid with her aunts and uncles. It's always a sense of trying to take care of your children.

Although there were conflicting views regarding the management of finances, the participants seemed to find a balance. Sharing was important, and when funds were

limited during postsecondary education years, participants used their budgeting skills. The students did well regardless of their socioeconomic backgrounds. This counters the outdated, biased opinions of Lassiter (1966) and Malik (1966). It also rejects the *cultural deficit* theory (Deutch 1967, Reissman, 1962), which rationalizes that the child who does not "benefit" from the material goods supply and lifestyle of the dominant culture is underprivileged.

The participants were given the freedom to make decisions early in life, and these decisions were supported. Sports and extracurricular activities were chosen freely and decisions supported by the parents. Expectations, rules, and consequences were not strongly stressed. It seemed that the participants acknowledged the love and support shown by parents, and they did not want to disappoint them in any way. As they grew older, they all made their own decisions as to what they would study and where they would go. Pepper and Henry (1986) stressed that culture and child-rearing affect learning:

> The activity patterns to which many Indian children are exposed to are rooted in number of important values. These include such things as generosity and sharing, cooperation and group harmony, placidity and patience, behavioral expression, different concepts of time, different values of ownership and property. These values are generally learned in an informal manner and unconsciously applied. Traditional Indian child-rearing practices have been labeled by some as "permissive" in comparison to European-American society standards. This misunderstanding usually occurs because Indian child-rearing is self-exploratory rather than restrictive. In this way, self discipline is learned by an Indian child as a natural result of child-rearing practices whereas the European-American child has to be taught self-discipline later in life. Many Indian children are trained to be self-directed and self-reliant, by having the freedom to make many of their own choices and decisions. (p. 55)

From my experience of working within the northern school system, the lack of a solid foundation (family) for many children proved to be a significant barrier to achieving success. Many Aboriginal families in the NWT need assistance to become stronger. Parenting skills were not learned during the residential school days when students

remained away from their homes and parents for extended periods of time. Other significant reasons may include a rapid change in culture and loss of language and culture. I believe that the main focus of educators and leaders in the NWT needs to be on restoring healthy families. I agree with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples (1996a) that:

> healing the wounds of Aboriginal families is absolutely essential to achieving the rest of the Aboriginal agenda of self-reliance and self-determination. The family is the mediating structure, the bridge between the private world of the vulnerable child and the unfamiliar, too often hostile world of non-Aboriginal society (p. 22)

The Government of the NWT continues to support the education system in alleviating the stresses by adding additional funding to the existing tremendous budget. Sometimes this is necessary; however, the issues are not being addressed by increasing teacher wages or adding more computers to the schools. We are expecting the schools (educators and administrators) to continue to absorb the problems, and they do increase. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996a) recommended that more funding be made available to assist families:

> It is our conviction that much of the failure of responsibility that contributes to the current imbalance and stress in Aboriginal life centres around the family. Let us clarify at the outset that the failure of responsibility that we seek to understand and correct is not a failure of Aboriginal families. Rather, it is a failure of public policy to recognize and respect Aboriginal culture and family systems and to ensure a just distribution of the wealth and power of this land so that Aboriginal nations, communities and families can provide for themselves and determine how best to pursue a good life. (p. 9)

Connection to the Land

> The land was so beautiful and we were so lucky to have it. Whenever we were hunting with Mom and Dad, we were always reminded of how lucky we were. We used everything, used the land for boating, it was just a nice experience. You don't realize it as a kid; later on in life you recognized it. (Janelle)

These students from the North are in a unique situation compared to their counterparts in the rest of Canada. The wilderness is almost out their back doors. Many

Aboriginal people continue to rely on hunting and fishing as their main source of food. Spending time on the land, and the teachings of Aboriginal traditions were both valued by the students. Janelle related her experiences on the land:

> Hunting was always a big part of our lives. We grew up like that. Growing up, I ate fish and wild meat most of the time. People were always surprised at the things we ate, we ate bear, beaver, ducks, muskrat, rabbits. We always liked to eat beaver tail. We'd cook it on the fire until it blew up. I wouldn't say my mom was totally Catholic, because she had a close connection to the land. That's how her dad raised her; she was always big on hunting. Even though she went to church, she followed rules that were spiritual. I think she told us that the first animal you see, you don't shoot it. You give thanks to the Creator for letting you see that animal. I've never done it.

Brad shared his thoughts on being from the North and learning about culture:

> I tell people I'm from the North. I'm constantly talking about the North, whether it be hunting or fishing; there is nothing that compares to it. I don't hunt in the States. For me, the only hunting I do is coming back here in the fall; that's the only time I hunt and fish and stuff. Culturally, my mom had stories when we'd be hunting, "How the Raven Got Its Feathers," how, when she was growing up, when they would clean animals and stuff, what they would do and why they would do it. Her parents, how they used to hunt. Culturally, through Mom a lot of that was instilled. It wasn't just brought up through religion, but more culturally. Not that we'd ask questions; it would just work its way into whatever we were doing, through learning from my parents and stuff. It's always, "You take what you need," and that's what you go out and hunt for. . . and really a sense of knowing what the animals are providing for you and not a real disregard. We never threw garbage around.

Traditional Aboriginal food was the staple food of most of the participants. They spoke very positively about eating buffalo, caribou, moose, fish, bear, beaver, ducks, geese, muskrat, grouse, and rabbits. Two of the participants went into great detail describing 'goodies' such as eating moose stomachs and tongues; cooking beaver tails in the spring; a grandmother eating porcupine, trout heads, and "all kinds of other neat stuff." The wide variety of northern food was always available as the students moved south to attend postsecondary education. Families continuously sent "care" packages with these precious contents. Amber recalled living in university residence:

> My parents sent me a bag of drymeat, . . .black gold. I would wolf down the meat with my friend [also from the North]. I missed eating the fresh meat because it was harder to get when I was in Saskatoon.

Janelle also recalled receiving care packages and being supplied with traditional foods: "My mom always sent stuff up, especially when I was in residence, she would send me drymeat and all sorts of other stuff. When I lived on my own I always had caribou or moose meat, fresh bread, berries."

An interesting point here is that three of the participants chose studies that were closely connected to the land and people. Native studies, environmental studies, natural resources, resource economics and law were areas of interest. Studies that were relevant and significant to their daily lives were important. The participants also indicated that it was important that they return and contribute to growth and development in the North.

An important part of the participants identities was the connection to the land which was their culture: they learned lessons of respect and care. The foods that they loved came from the land. Many Aboriginal students do not have the privilege of having these experiences and some do, but to a lesser degree. Educators of Aboriginal students need to recognize and acknowledge the traditional experiences as part of their knowledge. They must also identify the educational strategies that most effectively build on their cultural identity. McCaleb (1994) states that when a teacher is willing to do this, then growth and learning can take place:

> To help build the kind of self-esteem that is necessary not only for classroom learning but also for all further learning, teachers must accept the cultural, linguistic, and historical experiences that students bring to the classroom, there by allowing students to feel that their identities are validated. All knowledge that students bring to school and all knowledge shared by students, including the family and cultural histories, is to be valued. The teacher's role is to communicate an interest and willingness to incorporate the student's reality into the classroom medium for learning. (p. 41)

Maina (1997) cited Hamme, whose words also reflect this view:

> It is clear from this point of view that educators of First Nations children need to develop educational strategies that effectively build on the cultural strengths of First Nations children and which include: the use of teaching methods and curricula that are congruent with individual and cultural learning and communication styles, (2) the direct integration of First Nations cultural concepts with curricular areas designed for competence in the larger society, (3) teaching about First Nations achievements and their historical contributions to the overall culture of this country, and (4) inclusion of materials relating to the participation and contributions of First Nations both to their communities and to the larger Canadian society in the contemporary world. (p. 302)

I believe that given the respect for their histories and culture, Aboriginal students will develop a strong sense of identity. This is particularly important for academic success when, if they choose to further their studies in the south, they may be the only Aboriginal student in a classroom. From personal experience, there is a big difference between the northern school experience where you may be one of the majority (Aboriginal) and the southern experience.

Role Models

Throughout discussions, parents stood out as the most influential factors in the lives of the participants. This degree of parental influence suggests that they were completely involved in all aspects of their children's lives, yet they were able to stand back and give their children decision making powers at an early age.

All participants valued their parent's experiences and knowledge and described their parents as being "smart." There was a common pride in what their parents had accomplished. The participants acknowledged that they were aware of their parents' experiences with residential schools, lack of education, addictions in some families, poverty; they remembered these stories clearly. Parents taught values such as treating others as they would want to be treated, which was as important as not judging people. In reference to inebriated individuals in the community Brad explained: "You don't know what any individual has experienced in their life that brought them to that point. We were

always around people that others might think of as drunks; well, they weren't always drunks, you know."

Although equal respect was given to all family members, some, like Janelle, had someone who stood out, as this narrative indicates:

> It's always hard to talk about my mom without getting emotional. I'm equally proud of both of my parents; they are both role models to me. My mom, being a woman . . . coming from such a large, poor family. In the winter, a snack for her was mustard and crackers. There was dysfunction in her own family, to know that she has gone through all of that, and she is very much a strong member in her own family. So just watching her, learning things from her; she is definitely one of the big role models in my life.
>
> My mom is an avid hunter. Most women would probably teach their daughters how to bead or sew; my mom is into hunting. This fall we will be going hunting for two weeks. I will be learning. My mom is going to be calling my sisters, my aunts, my uncles. My mom is a very strong woman. I don't mean to disrespect my dad [but] she made a lot of decisions. Sometimes that caused tension in the family, both wanting to be decision makers. I had strong support from both sides.

Amber viewed her parents as heroes or mentors and people she aspired to be like:

> My parents, I see how happy they are. That's the way I want to be when I am more settled down . . . . take the responsibility of a job, and do the job well . . . raise a family and be happy about it.

Brad credited both of his parents as having a strong influence on him throughout life:

> In the house with dad, he was always trapping in the winter and mom was sewing, so you saw a lot of traditional activity. Watching dad go through and taking care of the animal. It was always neat to see how much appreciation he had of animals. He would take so much time stretching a lynx or beaver very detailed about making it nice. I think that transferred to what and who I am, even things like how he takes care of his yard, how he wants everything to be. The same with my mom with her sewing, and being so open with people. My dad isn't a very open person. He is, when you get to know him, but until you get to know him and who he is, Mom, she can have people over all the time. She is just very easy going, could talk with anyone. That's one of the great things I got from her, the ability to communicate with lots of people. She talks to anyone. If it's an old rubby walking down the road, mom would pick him up and give him a ride. To me, I would think, Wow, what the heck are you doing? She would just say, "You never know when someone might need a lift in life on that day, and maybe that was his lift.

Brad spoke of his older sister who inspired him in future decisions:

> My oldest sister and I were eight years apart. She was my role model. She always did well in sports, seeing her leave the community and go off to college down south, then off to the University of Alberta and playing basketball had a big affect on me as far as what I wanted to do. I used to always tag along behind her. A big part of who I am was from my oldest sister. I told her once at a banquet that she was my hero. More than anything, because of what she was doing, it was what I wanted to do. I think that a lot of time students don't know what is achievable; they don't know it's out there. School afforded me so much that I'm always trying to advocate it.

Identity and Character

> To Native people, identity, pride and a positive self-image are one and the same thing. They are crucial to achievement in school and in all aspects of life. (Janice Dawson, 1998)

Culture strengthens identity and character. Common values of respect, acceptance, and pride in the participants' Métis heritage were instilled from an early age. The ties to the Aboriginal culture were very strong, with the participants having been exposed to life on the land, eating traditional foods, and interacting with local people and activities. The participants believed that they had the best of both worlds. Throughout the discussions, all of the participants exhibited a very strong sense of personal identity. An issue with two of them was that their physical appearance did not show that they were Aboriginal. This sometimes caused tension, as Amber related:

> I always make sure to tell people. I know that a lot of people, just from my coloring assume that I am non-Native. . . . I always make sure I'm right there telling them, No, I'm Métis and this is how it is. I was always very proud of being Métis, and that is what my parents instilled in me. I didn't realize any difference in my early years. There were Native kids and there were White kids. We just played happily together. Growing up, it didn't seem like there was much of a difference.

When asked what it meant to be Métis, the same participant replied:

> It means a lot to me, it's really something special. We're the product of the mixing of these two different types of people, Indian and White people. Out of this came the Métis. I know I've always thought of it as having the best of both worlds. . . . It was something really special. Learning the history of Louis Riel,

> how they fought for what they believed in, that makes me really proud to say that I am Métis. Identity is there, within your consciousness.

Janelle gained Indian status through Bill C-31, yet identified with being Métis. For a number of years it was accepted in the NWT that people who had regained Indian status through Bill C-31 were allowed to remain members of the Métis Nation:

> I can't say point blank, "This is who I am or what I think." and it will probably change as I go on, so that's always been kind of hard growing up; maybe later, in my teen years and especially going to university. Everyone wants to label you, so you have to be able to say who you are, where you come from. I always considered myself an Aboriginal person; I consider myself Métis; I have status. So especially going to Alberta, there's even controversy there, especially since my mom is a Bill C-31. I get people saying "You can't be status and you can't be Métis." My sister is involved in a lot of Aboriginal sports organizations, and she faces that too. We talk about how weird it is, because we never consider that, it's not an issue [that we have to be one way or the other]. My mom considers herself both. Going to law school, taking political science in my undergrad, I had a problem with that. Government, their policy, their everything, they do so much division within Aboriginal peoples, it is really frustrating to me. Going to conferences, meetings or Native organizations, you have to state who you are. It seems no matter what, people try to attack you on all sides. My family is very proud of their Métis heritage, my brother, my aunties. The whole Bill C-31 is a very big issue with them; they totally consider themselves Métis. The fact that someone says you can't be both. The government policy that has divided people, that's wrong.

Janelle's strong Métis identity compelled her to research the issue further in her studies:

> When I was going to law school she [Mom] asked me to look into it. I don't know if they ever thought of the idea of legally challenging it. I did research into it, and of course, this thing with the government. Their answer to it was that it was the social morals of the time. Yeah, we know it was a racist policy, but it was the policy of the time so we can't do anything to change that, so they did their Bill C-31, but I think they made a bigger mess of it. I did my research into that, and it's not going to be rectified, the whole fact of a Native woman marrying a non-Native man and losing their status and everything.

Supported by the students' narratives above, the evidence is clear that encouragement, support, and interest in what the children are doing affect attitudes and aspirations. Given responsibility and decision-making powers at an early age, the participants appeared to equate this with respect, a value which they all carried with

them.. Being connected to the land, observing traditional activities, and maintaining a traditional diet while away from home contributed to building and maintaining a strong sense of identity among these Métis students. Pride in their homeland and heritage was evident throughout all the discussions.

A strong sentiment voiced throughout was that the participants identified with and honored both their mother's and their father's heritage. In doing so, it appears that they felt that they had the best of both worlds. I agree with the points made by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996b) regarding the heritage of Métis:

> Despite regional differences, the aspect of culture is shared by all Métis people is that they embrace both sides of their heritage. They reject the notion that they should choose an Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal identity, and they resist measuring degrees of affiliation with either side, a strategy others might wish to use to categorize them as something other than Métis. (p. 637)

An interesting fact is that the participants noted that they were never pushed or forced into anything. They knew that as long as they were doing their best, that is what their parents expected of them. Whether it was competitive sports, playing, or academics, the emphasis was always on their personal best. A participant working on a doctoral degree spoke about how his mother always encouraged him to do his best, and he maintained a high average throughout his postsecondary years. He felt that the pressures that non-Aboriginal parents put on their children were stressful. After completing his last semester, Brad called his mother and joked with her: "Once I phoned Mom and said, 'I just finished a semester and got all Ds.' She said, 'Oh, that's good, as long as you tried your best."

The importance of a strong cultural identity cannot be overemphasized. This is particularly true for Aboriginal students. Many have parents or grandparents who have lost part of their cultural identity while attending residential schools. I strongly believe that affirming one's culture, heritage, and identity has a positive effect and facilitates academic growth. I believe that the strong sense of identities and characters within the

students have been developed by having a strong family background that included pride in culture and heritage. The results were evident: The students were positive and truly believed that they were able to achieve, whatever their aspirations were.

Elementary School

The participants were students in their respective communities throughout their elementary school years (from kindergarten to Grade 6 or 7). Elementary school was a positive experience in which participants were surrounded by close siblings, cousins, and friends. From a young age, education was supported at home. The teachers at this level were encouraging; however, the participants felt that they had not been challenged academically. At this level, the students began to develop strong reading skills. Some felt this was influenced by teachers, others their own aspirations. In some instances, teachers became involved in the students' lives, especially in the smaller communities. Some lent books to students; one student visited teachers in their homes and baked. These teachers encouraged them to do their best and they were coaches in sports or volunteered their time in extracurricular activities. One participant reflected on a teacher who felt strongly about praying in class. Although some students snickered, the teacher continued. This action instilled a sense of "doing what you believe in regardless of how others feel." Another teacher who "made learning fun and interesting" was also remembered for her expression in reading. The participant commented:

> She used to read this story called *Sword of Shanara,* The way in which she would read it captivated us all. It was amazing. I had never heard anyone read like that. It was interesting. Now when I read I still think of her, because she was one of the main reasons I started reading more. Before that, I never read a whole lot.

Contenta (1997) stated the significance of elementary school years:

> The elementary years are where the passion for learning is either nourished or destroyed. The focus must be on learning without fear. The only failures at this stage are teachers and school administrators. Children shouldn't be judged by preset arbitrary standards. Those with 'cultural capital' that corresponds to that of the school are more likely to succeed when everyone is being asked to pass

> through the same filter. Not surprisingly, those from white-middle-class or more affluent backgrounds tend to make it through. To value and build on the knowledge, culture and strengths that each child brings to school would make the process more equitable. To do so, schools should broaden what they define as intelligence. At the moment, students capable of manipulating abstract symbols-those who can let x equal y in a vacuum-are showered with marks and dignity. Children who have difficulty separating abstract thought from their emotions are penalized for failing to sever body and mind. (pp. 199-200)

Although the elementary school years are often overlooked they do have a profound impact on how students feel about learning. The students who participated in this study clearly remembered their years in the elementary schools and the impression was lasting.

Cultural Programs and Local History

There were no cultural skills or local history taught at this level, participants felt this was a loss to those students who were not exposed to a traditional lifestyle at home. Brad shared his thoughts:

> My sister now does cultural events in the school, like taking ducks and cleaning them. Some of the kids I know really haven't had the same experience that I had, being able to go out and shoot ducks, plucking them. I shot my first duck when I was eight. I remember coming back from hunting, making a fire at the back of the cabin, plucking and singeing the ducks there. Some kids never had this experience. I was lucky enough to be able to do that. There isn't a lot of cultural activity in the school, even in high school, there wasn't much.

Amber recalled similar experiences in her elementary school years:

> I don't remember being taught a lot of cultural stuff in school. I remember going out on a cultural camp in the spring, that was the only time. We fleshed a beaver, but that was not a lot. I learned from our Cree Teacher quite a bit, names of animals and other things. I think that now, after taking Native Studies courses I can see how important it is that young kids should know their history and know more about their people. That was one of the reasons I took Native Studies. I wanted to learn more about my people, learn more about politics, why some things were the way they were.

The participants had the opportunity from an early age to learn about the land and the culture of the people. They revealed that they felt fortunate to be able to have spent

time learning all that they had. When the students spoke of their experiences, it was always with pride and love. For those Aboriginal students who do not have the same opportunity to learn from their families, it is a necessity that the cultural values be instilled in their formal educational experience. Maina (1997a) cited Billings, Hamme, McCaleb, and Archibald, in discussing culturally relevant pedagogy:

> Research on the education of First Nations and other minority group students has also shown that schools which respect and support a child's culture demonstrate significantly better outcomes in educating these students. As well, classroom approaches which are sensitive to the child's culture promote academic achievement by providing cultural relevance and a rationale for accepting school. (p. 294)

The assembly of Alaska Native Educators (1998) described what it means to be "culturally responsive":

> It is predicated on the belief that a firm grounding in the heritage, language and culture indigenous to a particular place is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of culturally-healthy students and communities associated with that place, and thus is an essential ingredient for identifying the appropriate qualities and practices associated with culturally-responsive educators, curriculums and schools. (p. 2)

Steps such as this being taken by First Nations educational systems are positive in recognizing the significance of Aboriginal students learning, culture, language, and history.

Academic Challenge and Extracurricular Activities

At about Grades 6 or 7, the participants began to notice a bit of difference in how students were treated. The participants felt that they coasted much of the time, yet, their marks remained average or above average. One participant stated:

> It depended on the teacher. If you were in the group where the teachers knew your parents or your parent was a teacher, you were challenged academically. If you were on the outside of this group, you never got challenged.

In the early elementary years, there were few organized sports. Students participated in physical education and spent lots of time playing outdoors. In later elementary years, more organized sports such as soccer, volleyball, track and field, and cross-country running were established. Out- of -school sports such as hockey and figure skating, became important focuses for two of the participants at this stage.

Taking personal initiative and responsibility for their own learning and activities was encouraged. The students also mentioned that participating in extracurricular activities was a positive factor in their achievements. Extracurricular activities allowed the opportunity for students from the North to travel, both within the territories and within the rest of Canada. Travel in the North is usually by air and very costly and many families do not have the resources to allow their children to travel. Therefore, many do not experience a southern lifestyle before the postsecondary experience.

Again, it was never felt that these activities were chosen or pushed by the parents. Once the children showed interest, the parents encouraged them, and came up with the necessary money to pay for the fees. It was usually one parent who became very involved in driving, volunteering time, and watching.

Community

Community life was important to the participants. During their years growing up in their respective communities, they felt secure in the familiarity of their community; there were no clear differences among Aboriginal people and everyone worked and played together. They thought that their communities were the best places to live, naming various sites and specific activities. Knowing the people and having people know who they were was important. The participants continue to enjoy going back home whenever the opportunity arises.

Unity

The participants felt that as they were growing up, their communities were unified. If there was any division between groups, it was not to the extent that occurs now. Memories of the various communities included family-oriented events such as Christmas parties, Christmas concerts, carnival, hunting and picnicking with other families. One participant noted, "There was definitely a lot more community involvement in activities." Another recalled, "There was support and care everywhere." Because the participants did not see themselves directly involved in issues or organizations that divided people, they felt that they could still return after studying down south, feel that they were a part of the community and fit in again.

It was also felt that families had been more supportive of each other in the past. The participants indicated that they felt secure in having extended family and close family friends who knew them well. By participating in in-school sporting events or travelling with parents on weekends, the participants also became aware of the surrounding communities and the local people there. A connection was established, and it was felt that the people in the surrounding communities knew of their achievements and supported them.

High School

All participants spent at least some of their high school years in the North. Transitions occurred during these years for three of the participants. Two moved to a southern school; one to pursue athletics, the other because his mother was attending university. Another moved with family to a larger community so that an older sibling would not have to attend residential school.

Teacher Expectations and Racial Differences

> I found that with certain teachers, if you wanted to just squeeze by, you did just that. You could definitely see the difference between Aboriginal and White

> students. With the White students, there was more poking and prodding because maybe that teacher knew the father or the mother or whatever.

The participants had a difficult time in relating negative experiences. Overall, they had maintained respect for their educators throughout the years; however, they felt that it was an important enough subject to discuss. Differences in advising and directing Aboriginal students became more apparent during these years. Brad commented on what he witnessed:

> I remember . . . advising students to go into advanced or general programs and courses. And I remember thinking, why? A lot of it was Aboriginal students going into the general course. That was just the way it had always been done, and that's what you were supposed to do. You were either in the advanced or general program. If you were in the general program, you never thought you were going to university. In the advanced program you were always thought of as being smarter. I never ever believed I was smarter. I really think that once you were stuck in the general area, you were stuck! You had a very, very tough time getting out of it. One of my fears was going into that area: it just seemed easier, and there wasn't a whole lot of caring. I would always see what the teachers' kids were doing and that's what I would do.

Janelle related a particular incident that had an impact on her:

> Once I wrote a paper to be submitted to a speech competition, we all wrote a paper in English class and our teacher said there were a few that should be submitted. We had to do it [read] in front of our class. Our classmates chose me and another girl. The teacher was choosing students to travel to a speech competition. He really didn't like it when the class chose me over her. It was like he tried to persuade the class to choose hers or that hers was better, saying that hers could be developed to be better. Just the fact that he said that, made me want to do better.

Brad commented further:

> We had some great teachers. I think we could use more teachers like. . . . they get you involved and excited. You can do anything. Even the kid in the corner who doesn't want to do anything will get excited. They weren't expected to do good, so it wasn't expected of them [teachers] to teach them harder. I noticed it, it wasn't clear. They would teach normally. Some of my friends who were Aboriginal could get away with being cheeky, it just floated by the teacher and nothing would happen to them. Their behavior was never challenged.

Regardless of these barriers, the participants remained positive. The family support and encouragement throughout the years had prepared them to make positive choices and to enjoy these years. There were teachers who had inspired them at this level as well. One noted:

> It was kind of neat when a teacher told us and showed us why we were learning something and showed more of a higher goal of leaning. Not just getting by, and I thought that was really good because a lot of the time we're supposed to just get by.

I believe that the issue of low teacher expectations needs to be addressed. This is another positive reason to focus on the 'proficient' philosophy (Meyer, 1998) as opposed to the 'deficient' philosophy. Not only would the successful students be inspiring to other students, but they might also serve to change teacher attitudes.

According to Braun, Good, and Smith (as cited in Codjoe, 1997), "As a group, teachers form one of the most critical factors in bringing about a quality educational process and their expectations play an important part in student achievement and self image" (p. 187). Codjoe emphasized a concern regarding low teacher expectation. He discussed the "teacher expectancy theory," citing Irvine, who stated:

> Teachers form expectations for student achievement and thus treat students differently because of these expectations. Over time, students begin to behave in ways that are consistent and reinforcing of the teacher's expectations, behaviour that results in either positive or negative outcomes related to academic achievement, self concept, motivation, aspirations, conduct and teacher-student interactions. (p. 187)

Students in this study indicated that they witnessed instances in which teachers directed Aboriginal students to go into a general program, rather than an academic one when they entered high school. The issue of low teacher expectation among Aboriginal or minority students is a difficult one to approach; however, the educational expectations are relevant and comprehensible to the students involved. I have always taken into consideration the words of a close colleague and friend who teaches by the philosophy

that children will rise to your expectations. She has taught several older students who have 'fallen between the cracks' to read proficiently. Low teacher expectations serve as a barrier to academic achievement, therefore must be acknowledged and strategies must be developed to assist teachers to examine their attitudes, assumptions and beliefs about Aboriginal students.

Preparation for Postsecondary Education

The participants who spent the majority of their high school years in the NWT commented that they did not feel that the schools prepared them for post secondary education. They generally agreed that they needed more direction in selecting programs and scheduling. Study skills could have been emphasized more strongly as well as requirements for the various disciplines in southern postsecondary institutions. The students who had transferred outside of the territories felt that they were better prepared in the south. Brad, who spent two years going to school in the south, explained:

> There was really no direction as far as where I was going and what I was doing when I was up north. The direction that I went was based on wanting to go to university. It was the last two years that I made this decision. I don't think kids from the North know what is obtainable and more times than not, we are in the dark about things. I would have thought the best thing to do was to finish high school and work in my community because that's what everyone did. I knew about school because my older sister went and no one else in my family did. My best friend and I were so similar until it came to the part of school. School is where I took off.

Janelle explained her situation once she had applied to university and received her letter of acceptance:

> I didn't know all about the disciplines, like political science or psychology. I didn't know about all of these. I didn't know about the procedure, because no one in my family had gone. My dad went for one year at a very young age; other than that, no one had ever gone to university. I was a bit shocked when I finally started the procedure. I started working on it too late. I didn't feel I had a lot of guidance or support. The resources were probably there somewhere, but I didn't know how to get started. I got my acceptance, chose my courses. I didn't know about scheduling. I had classes at 8 a.m. and late at night. After my second semester I

> sure changed that around. I didn't know anything about course selections or degrees. I picked some courses that I knew I was good at. But I definitely needed more guidance. I wasn't even thinking long term; degree. So, it was kind of weird. I figured it out as I went along.

Transition to Postsecondary Institutions

Wilson (1997) discussed several factors in minority student performance and achievement. The importance of relationships with professors, accessibility, approachability and availability, genuineness and caring were noted as important factors in achievement at the postsecondary level. The participants involved asserted that they had gained support from professors or advisors. Establishing a community network of friends from back home was also important for most students.

Initial moves from the North to the south were difficult. One participant had a sister living in a southern city, so she chose to go there, another had sports to keep him occupied. Students communicated with family members by telephone on a regular bases, and phone calls were expensive. Family members visited whenever possible. "Care packages" from home contained the foods that the participants enjoyed most. Visits home on holidays such as Christmas and during Reading Week made the stay down south more bearable.

The participants had confidence in meeting new challenges. They had high expectations of themselves and were aware that their families were proud of them and supported their efforts. Although there were difficulties in adjusting to a new environment, the drive to complete what they had started was strong. The students attributed their home environment and being involved in a sport to which they felt committed contributed to their success. This is not to say that the young people did not have a social life. One stated:

> The second year I lived in residence and my social life took off. It was party, party, party. My academics never really suffered. I was an average student. I excelled at the courses I really liked. In my third year I socialized quite a bit, and

> after that I was more focused. I became involved in the Women's Club, Northern Students' Association, stuff like that.

Another student had similar experiences:

> I was pretty busy the first year, the new found freedom…At the same time my parents had allowed me to have enough freedom when I lived with them that it wasn't that I went wild. I think I did a lot of socializing but it didn't affect me. I knew what my priorities were. I would always hear stories about kids from the North. They would spend their first year partying, fail out of school, come back to the North, and who knows what happened to them after that? I didn't want to be like that. I didn't want to disappoint my parents. I knew that I had to get through it and do it well.

The participants received student financial assistance through loans and grants administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment in the NWT, which included a living allowance and tuition payment. Each of them returned to the North during the summer months to work and save. Janelle related how she learned her budgeting skills:

> I probably learned my budget skills from my Dad. He was always like that. My mom was more likely to give her money away to people who needed it. I did a budget for myself, gave myself a limit to spend each month and I've never been broke at the end of the semester. Maybe once or twice throughout the years I received money from my parents. I just budgeted well.

Another participant related:

> Growing up, my parents encouraged me to get a part time job. I also got allowances for doing chores. I had to have good skills. I was told to pay everything on time, not to leave bills all over the place. I didn't want to be that kind of a person.

Overall, the single most important factor in the lives of these successful students was the strong family network and support system that remained in place throughout their early years, high school, and postsecondary education. Many Aboriginal families in the North do not have the opportunity of stability, sharing, and love that these students had. The reliability and stability of strong families is an unconditional strength which the

participants felt throughout their lives. Regardless of whether they were successful in academics or not, they knew that they had the support and love of their families.

A strong connection to the land, the people, and the culture is another significant factor in attaining success. The participants interviewed experienced life on the land, the rivers, and the lakes of the North. They have hunted, trapped, fished, picked berries, camped, and enjoyed a traditional lifestyle. Growing up with traditional foods was considered a positive factor. After they left home to attend educational institutions in the North, they were continuously supplied with food from the North. The trips home for holidays and summers offered an opportunity to get back to the land. The experience of extracurricular activities, especially sports, also contributed to a sense of confidence and self-assuredness.

Positive role models within their families helped to build confidence and served to influence their own expectations about their academic success. Extended family members who shared their negative experiences and overcame the barriers were a notable influence on the participants.

These factors contributed to a strong sense of identity and character. The participants believed that they had the best of both worlds. This strong sense of identity and character allowed them to acknowledge and resist the lack of expectations and the racial differences which they noticed within the formal education experience. Individual attitudes and behaviors contributed to a great sense of respect, quiet resistance, and high expectations. These factors combined seemed to allow the students to take ownership and personal initiative for the academic goals they had set for themselves and to overcome the barriers facing Aboriginal students from the North who are attending southern postsecondary institutions.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Summary

This study has examined and documented the experiences of four academically successful northern Aboriginal students who have attended postsecondary institutions in southern Canada and the United States. Throughout, the significant characteristics of positiveness and resilience emerged repeatedly. The individuals, each with varied perceptions and insights, provided a challenge to the usual negative portrayal of Aboriginal educational successes in the North. The analysis of this study is derived from the narratives of the northern students and the relevant social-science literature. I have analyzed the collected data and discussed what I understand to be the significant findings in the previous chapter.

This group of students has been self-selected and does not represent a homogeneous group. I do not propose that the students have spoken for a larger group; my hope is to provide an opportunity to acknowledge their experiences and accomplishments. I believe that by listening to their narratives, by sharing their experiences, we, as educators, leaders, and community members, can also detract from the negatives. These student experiences can provide a course for us to truly perceive possibilities for the future as well as to visualize the rightful place of Aboriginal students in our communities and societies.

I struggled with the issue of generalization. Could I be generalizing the findings based on a selected few Aboriginal students? As I have stated, the literature on successful Aboriginal educational experiences is minimal, and almost nonexistent when it comes to students from the North who transfer to southern postsecondary institutions. The same is true for Métis students specifically. It is difficult to connect experiences of minorities in education with regard to the North. First of all, Aboriginal people are the majority in the

NWT; however, the educational system has reflected the dominant culture in terms of curriculum, teachers, and administrators. Second, the situation of Aboriginal people in the NWT is unique. Métis and Dene are closely connected, usually by family ties. Third, the students I have studied have had to make vast changes in their lives in pursuit of higher education. When they move thousands of kilometers away from home it is often difficult to adapt. Literature is only beginning to emerge which has focused on successes rather than failures. I have cited research on other successful minorities, and the results support my findings.

Major Research Findings

Successful Aboriginal students have a strong spirit of positiveness and resilience. They believe in themselves and appear to maintain a strong sense of efficacy. Academically, Aboriginal students had high aspirations and expectations of themselves. Attaining high levels of education is important, not strictly for personal reasons, but to be able to "give back to the communities." Recognition of achievements and accomplishments is needed.

Successful Aboriginal students possess a strong sense of self-identity. A Traditional lifestyle is valued, as is the connection to the land. Awareness of culture is important to maintain a strong identity and positive self-esteem. The following are the factors which enabled these selected students to succeed in higher education:

1. Extended family support and contribution are crucial to the success of Aboriginal students. Education is valued and accomplishments are recognized by Aboriginal families. Family members serve as role models and support decisions of younger family members from an early age. Families recognize the importance of maintaining and preserving cultural knowledge, and the importance of a traditional diet is acknowledged.

2. Successful Aboriginal students value challenges, academic and behavior, in elementary and high schools. Low teacher expectations and attitudes hinder student success.

3. Successful Aboriginal students view formal teachings of Aboriginal culture and history as important in both elementary and high school. Postsecondary Native studies courses in university enlightened these students and were important to their academic choices.

4. Preparation for postsecondary education is not adequate in the NWT. It is necessary for Aboriginal students to learn what is attainable and how to study and set educational goals. Awareness of requirements for entrance into specific programs, courses, or faculties is important.

5. Sports and extracurricular activities enhance the educational experiences for Aboriginal students from an early age. Successful Aboriginal students experienced the opportunity to develop their skills and talents as well as to travel to various parts of the North and Canada.

6. Support, security, and care are significant factors in communities for the success of Aboriginal students. Pride in returning and recognition of a achievements are motivating factors.

7. A sense of support and "community" within the postsecondary institutional environment is important for Aboriginal students.

Recommendations

> Among the Dene, it is said the child is born with a drum in its hand. The child is born with integrity. The child has worth. It is the birthright of the Dene child to be acknowledged and respected for this. The child who is not respected cannot become what it is meant to be. (NWT Government, 1993, p. xvi)

In Chapter I, I have outlined the purposes and objectives of this thesis. One of the fundamental objectives was to draw some implications for school policies and practice

and for Aboriginal organizations and communities seeking control of education in their communities. This is done based on the findings from the student narratives, the related literature, and my own experiences as a student, educator, and community member in the NWT. We in the NWT are faced with many challenges; educating students today is a tremendous responsibility. As an educator, I believe that we can do more to improve education for Aboriginal students.

There are various cultural and language groups in the North. Social issues are compounding, the northern population is young, and the number of students with special needs is increasing. Despite these many issues, I still believe that there is potential for success. I believe that most Aboriginal students have high expectations for and aspirations of themselves. A report on education (NWT Government, 1999b) in the NWT titled *Towards Excellence* (1999) stated:

> Across the NWT many students indicated that they expected to attend university. Female students were more likely to believe that they will attend university. Given that the NWT graduation rate from secondary is school is 27% [overall], it appears many students hopes are unrealistic. The tendency for students to have high expectations for their future is prevalent across Canada. (p. 68)

If students have high expectations of themselves, it is our responsibility as educators, community members, and political leaders to assist them in making their aspirations a reality.

In the NWT, particularly over the past 10 years, there have been various strategies, studies, conferences, working groups, and published documents by the Department of Education in attempts to improve the educational state. Some examples of documents published are *Our Students, Our Future* (NWT Government, 1991), *Dene Kede Curriculum* (NWT Government, 1993), *People: Our Focus for the Future* (NWT Government, 1994), *A Report on Progress* (NWT Government, 1997), Educational Leadership Symposium Report (NWT Government, 1999), *Minister's Response to the Forum on Education* NWT Government, 1999a). These are positive initiatives. My

approach is to utilize the factors that enable Aboriginal student success in determining my recommendations. Perhaps some of the recommendations have been discussed and may be in a process of implementation by the Department or within regions by Aboriginal groups. These recommendations are based on the premise that despite the initiatives described above, there is still a long way to go to provide a positive and successful educational experience for Aboriginal students from the North.

1. Aboriginal organizations, leaders, educators should:
    - clearly define their vision of "education";
    - assess, evaluate, and state their goals;
    - establish clear policies, procedures, and responsibilities;
    - consult with students, elders, and Aboriginal educators in planning and implementing educational goals;
    - recognize the academic accomplishments and achievements of community members;
    - enlist the assistance of Northern students who have "succeeded"
    - ensure that the capabilities of strong and gifted learners are challenged;
    - be involved in hiring of educators within their communities;
    - ensure that teachers are aware of Aboriginal culture, language, and history and are prepared to implement them effectively within the schools;
    - ensure that teachers are aware of social issues of communities and strive to assist students within the schools;
    - ensure that educators make students aware of what is attainable from an early age (primary grades);
    - ensure that teachers provide support and encouragement to their students by holding high expectations for them and recognizing their achievements; and

- ensure that teachers are prepared to promote sports and extracurricular activities within the schools.

2. NWT Government Department of Education, Culture, and Employment should:

- view education in a more holistic manner to foster student growth mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually;
- work and plan with other government departments to encourage the healing and growth of families and communities;
- give more emphasis to finding ways of increasing the involvement of Aboriginal families and supporting them in the education of their children. Incentives should be given to educators and administrators to improve family/school relations and family involvement in the schools;
- adequately prepare students for postsecondary studies from early grades, and students should be aware of what is attainable and what is required for attaining these goals; and ensure that students are taught effective study skills;
- review their policies regarding the hiring of teachers, administrators, counselors, and so on to ensure that the hiring of these personnel reflects the Aboriginal population of the communities in which the schools are located as much as possible and to ensure follow-through and monitoring of these guidelines;
- develop a strategy to assist teachers and prospective teachers to examine their attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs about Aboriginal students; and
- develop a strategy to assist teachers in dealing with the problem of low expectations of Aboriginal students, ensure that Aboriginal teachers within the teacher education programs have access to courses in Aboriginal history and contemporary issues, and encourage teachers to explore

effective means by which to improve the success rate of Aboriginal students.

3. Aboriginal families should:
   - recognize that positive reinforcement of culture (traditions and values) and language both at home and at school enhances the educational experiences of students;
   - recognize the positive benefits of traditional foods and promote them within the home;
   - encourage their children to make decisions from a young age, and support the decisions;
   - communicate with students regarding the expectations that they perceive at school;
   - discuss postsecondary education with their children from a young age;
   - ensure that students are taught study skills and learn what is attainable and the requirements to get there; and
   - continue to support, encourage, and recognize accomplishments through postsecondary education.
4. Postsecondary institutions should:
   - acknowledge, value and encourage Aboriginal courses and programs
   - support the hiring of Aboriginal instructors and professors;
   - include the Aboriginal perspective on committees and councils;
   - support and encourage Aboriginal students from the smaller settlements;
   - review policies regarding orientation to Aboriginal cultures and provide opportunities for educators to learn;
   - encourage and support learning from elders and other Aboriginal community members; and

- give more emphasis to finding ways of increasing the Aboriginal student numbers in master's and doctoral programs.

Personal Reflections

> As writers, we realize the "doing" of research often affects the researcher more than the other way around. (Clearly & Peacock, 1998, p. 247)

Prior to beginning this research study, I believed that I needed to understand the failure of Aboriginal students in academics. As I indicated earlier, research generally focused on the underachievement of minorities and various attempts to understand the reasons behind these failures. I realized along the way that I, too, would be contributing to the emphasis on failures, thereby contributing to the negative portrayal of the Aboriginal educational experience. The fact that the majority of Aboriginal students in the NWT are not achieving academically did not escape me as I contemplated my approach. I considered various approaches to contribute to the understandings. In reflection, I also now acknowledge a personal shift in attitude along with the shift in approach.

Personal experiences within the education system had left a particularly negative cloud around me. In retrospect, I acknowledge that I had constructed my own negative cloud of resentment, frustration, anger, and fear. Resentment stemmed from awareness of the history of formal education for Aboriginal people in Canada in which "schools were the chief weapon of the missionaries and federal bureaucrats in their systematic campaign to destroy Indian culture" (York, 1992, p. 27). The historical awareness, combined with my personal "Aboriginal student" experiences created a tenacity which manifested in frustration and anger throughout my years as an "Aboriginal educator."

The frustration and anger evolved as I witnessed non-Aboriginal students succeeding within the northern educational system and Aboriginal students dropping out, with very little hope for a positive future. It soon became my personal goal to alter and

remedy a system that did not accommodate northern students well. I felt strongly that the non-Aboriginal educators should be required to become knowledgeable in the areas of Aboriginal history, language, culture, and present social conditions. I also believed that all Aboriginal educators should view the system the same way that I did and possess the same goals or visions that I did. This, I learned along the way, was not always true. Having Aboriginal teachers working within the schools is a positive factor in that it provides a reinforcement for Aboriginal students in the role model concept. The concepts of Indian identity, traditions, psychology, culture, language, and history are important in the education of Indians. Kirkness (1999) suggested that Indian teachers would be most effective in transmitting these concepts. I learned that not all Aboriginal educators believe that culture should be an integral part of a curriculum, and there are Aboriginal parents who do not believe that a change is required. Some are content because their children are doing quite well in the current system.

Fears developed as a result of my reflections on my personal role within the educational field. My personal belief that I was born to be an educator was strong, and I had responsibilities to fulfill. The realization that I was not successful in moving in the direction in which I felt compelled to do was disturbing. At some point I realized that I was not effective in enhancing the educational experiences of Aboriginal students in the long term. The activities and projects that I was able to initiate and in which I participated were not adequate. Perhaps I was also contributing to failure to some degree by imposing my view strongly, thus instilling opposition by others.

The experiences within graduate school were a challenging force for me—not strictly academic, but also personal. Courses in which I was enrolled consisted of students from other parts of the world who had come to the University of Alberta to study. Dialogue often centered around struggles in their native homeland and within Canada. Often there was reference to our "multicultural" society, as well as the rights of all Canadians. Although these discussions often left me with feelings of understanding

and sympathy, I began to feel a more urgent determination to explore methods to contribute to Aboriginal education in the North. I interacted with students from around the world and witnessed their desires and struggles to retain their cultures and languages within their communities and within the schools of their children. I began to see the Aboriginal educational struggle as being even greater. We were in our original homeland, trying to retain our cultures and languages and struggling to make the educational experience a meaningful one for our children.

Many of my courses in this program also consisted of groups of Aboriginal students pursuing graduate degrees. The influence of these fellow students strengthened my personal goals and visions. The free discussions and debates of our similar experiences and expectations allowed for healing, growth, and solutions. Interaction with elders, ceremonies, and prayers within our cohort group provided a spiritual and emotional balance throughout my studies. Support was evident throughout my personal and academic journey. At this stage I began to realize a newly developed sense of quiet, confident strength.

As I began my research, once again I was not prepared for the wisdom and strength of the young participants that would affect me. They spoke with passion, intelligence, eagerness, and confidence. Their stories of triumph, discouragement, achievements, and struggles were shared with both laughter and tears. I considered the trust given to me in the hopes that their experiences would benefit students, parents, educators, and leaders in the future an honor and an "awesome" responsibility to present it meaningfully. I realize that when stories such as these are shared, they are filtered through the listener's own perceptions and world view. It is my hope that my study will have justly described and summarized as accurately as possible the educational and life journeys of these students who fit my description of being successful because they have discovered academic success in their individual educational paths, while maintaining a strong sense of identity as Aboriginal people.

These experiences, along with my attendance at the fifth tri-annual World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in Hawaii in 1999 had a profound impact on strengthening my views on the rights we have as Aboriginal people in Canada to define our concept of education and to attain this concept. An outcome from this conference was the ratification of an international document that recognizes and affirms Indigenous People's rights in education. This document, known as the Coolangatta Statement, is a culmination of six years of international dialogue conducted by an appointed task force from the 1993 conference and will be brought forward for presentation and recognition by the assembly of the United Nations in September 2000. This particular statement helped me to understand that, globally, there are Indigenous people who are realizing their inalienable right to be Indigenous, which includes the right to self-determination.

Within Canada the thrust toward self-determination is forceful as Aboriginal groups across the country are settling land claims and attempting to implement self-government. Kirkness (1999) described the purpose for a policy of 1972 titled Indian Control of Indian Education:

> In 1972 the Indian people of Canada articulated a policy in education that would place the responsibility for education of Indians with Indians. The policy, known as Indian Control of Indian Education, states: Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We believe in education:
> - as a preparation for total living;
> - as a means of free choice of where to live and work;
> - as a means of enabling us to participate in our own social, political and educational advancement. (p.68)

Further to this, the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) makes several recommendations in regard to education. The summary of recommendations, Volume 5 recommends that:

3.5.1 EDUCATION AND SELF GOVERNMENT

Federal, provincial and territorial governments act promptly to acknowledge that education is a core area for the exercise of Aboriginal self-government.

3.5.2 TRANSITIONAL CONTROL OF EDUCATION

Federal, provincial and territorial governments collaborate with Aboriginal governments, organizations or education authorities, as appropriate, to support the development of Aboriginally controlled education systems by

(a) introducing, adapting or ensuring the flexible application of legislation to facilitate self-starting initiatives by Aboriginal nations and their communities in the field of education;
(b) mandating voluntary organizations that are endorsed by substantial numbers of Aboriginal people to act in the field of education in urban and non-reserve areas where numbers warrant until such time as Aboriginal governments are established; and
(c) providing funding commensurate with the responsibilities assumed by Aboriginal nations and their communities, or voluntary organizations, given the requirements of institutional and program development, costs of serving small or dispersed communities, and special needs occurring from past failures of education services. (pp. 219-220)

With such initiatives, government policies, and supported recommendations, the time is right in Canada for Aboriginal people to initiate and assume control. I view the progress of settling land claims, establishing self-determination, and implementing self-government as positive; however, it also leaves open the possibility for failure if the planning process is not approached with caution.

Prior to assuming control of educational services and funding, there is a requirement of collaboration to dialogue on several issues by leaders, educators, and the general public. Definitions, goals, implementation plans, and responsibilities are to be defined.

As an Aboriginal educator involved in this process and effort to alter the Aboriginal educational experience, I see a necessity to reflect upon and evaluate my individual perspectives and the oppression I have a tendency to retain. Freire (1994) addressed the need to liberate from this oppression in order to look positively to the

future. This reflection I see as crucial as my historical experiences may prove to be barriers that cannot be surpassed. It is not to say that critical issues of Aboriginal people should be overlooked, but rather that the continuation of healing and growth must be fostered and supported. What I would suggest is more of a balance. Perhaps we as Aboriginal people hold ourselves down too often and in doing so are assisting the dominant society or government systems in maintaining the overall oppression. In order to contribute positively to the Aboriginal educational experience, I have investigated and discussed the continuing impact of assimilation and colonization within the educational system. This thesis is attempting to prove that we can overcome these issues, not by relying on blame or negatives of the past, but by looking to our successes, which are there. Clearly and Peacock (1998) , referring to Freire (1997) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, explained:

> A critical element of Paulo Freire's education for critical consciousness wasn't only speaking of awakening the critical consciousness of the oppressed; he was also speaking to the need for educators to confront themselves and their own practices, which have sometimes enslaved the schools that purport to educate children and have ultimately enslaved us as educators. (p. 255)

Throughout the course of my research I have often thought about a metaphor that I had applied to describe my educational experiences during a course offered by Dr. Eber Hampton titled "Indigenous Research Methodologies." I utilized the metaphor *trail* to describe this journey because it brought me back to my own people, the Gwich'in of the McKenzie Delta.

The Gwich'in are bush people who follow trails. Traditionally, they followed the caribou across the land as they hunted. They live along the MacKenzie River, which itself is like a winding trail with many forks (creeks and streams). The river provides a means to travel, to heal, to drink, to cleanse; and provides fish, a staple to the Gwich'in diet. Many of the people continue to travel on the river and are knowledgeable about "reading"

the water, the depths, the sand bars, and the directions, although there are thousands of forks.

When I was younger, I followed my mother when she went to set or visit rabbit snares. She had an instinct that she seemed to follow so naturally, always following one trail or another. Along the way she was always alert, probably noticing many things that I did not. When taking a new trail, she would sometimes mark her way with a knife slash on a willow.

Traplines are trails. They are trails that are individualized; each trapper has his own trail, which is known and respected by others. It is always monitored and used carefully by traditional people. When an area is overused, it is left to grow or replenish. From an aerial view, the trails resemble a web, all interconnected over a huge area of land. There are decisions to make along the way—which trail to take, which not to take—and sometimes you need to break your own. If you are not in tune with your surroundings and become disoriented, you could possibly lose your way. In areas of thick bush or deep snow someone always goes ahead to ease the way for followers. This is known as *breaking trail.*

During a discussion about my analogy with Dr. Hampton (June 1999), he quoted something he had read by Chief Poundmaker: "We are like a man that sat beside the trail so long it grew over. We can't go back, but neither can we keep sitting." This made me think of the educational path of the Aboriginal people in Canada over the past 500 years. We have been led along this path; there have been many sad forks and turns—residential schools, culture and language loss, and countless failures which are manifested through the unhealthiness we are witnessing today. We are not continuing to sit by the trail; there are currently positive advancements in education across Canada. We have the ability to cut our own trail and lay a foundation for solid footing for the future generations. There is a promising future for the new generations, and the movement can only get stronger

The trail I have taken in pursuit of higher education was not always a smooth one. As it was that first day I tried to go to school in Aklavik, my shoes have been stuck in the mud many times since. There were difficult decisions to make along the way. In 1993 I divided my family to move to Saskatchewan to complete my Bachelor of Education degree. The personal consequences were such that it took years to find stable ground again. During my teaching years, although I always had a vision intact, often I was on the wrong trail. The trail over the past two years is one on which I feel I have made the most progress. It has been satisfying both academically and personally. My shoes will no doubt be stuck in the mud again; however, I am now more confident that I will make good decisions if I come to a fork or if I should stumble.

The students involved in my research project had their own paths. They had clear visions of where they were going from an early age. Their paths were approached with integrity, intelligence, and foresight. I view them as breaking trail for others who are coming behind them. My hope is that we in the North will listen to their voices and take into consideration their stories and experiences in planning for the future. In learning from these students, I consider it my responsibility to pass on the teachings. The words of the late Chief Dan George (1974) reminds me that this is a Native value: "Of all the teachings we receive, this one is the most important: Nothing belongs to you; of what there is, of what you take, you must share" (p. 25).

EPILOGUE

Finding Solid Ground

I have frequently referred to my educational experiences as a 'journey.' This journey has led me on various *trails*, and the course of the trails has often been difficult to travel. However, I now comprehend, and appreciate the personal education I have derived from each of these experiences. I say personal because the experiences and lessons I have had affected me more as a human (a whole person) than as a student or a teacher within an academic setting. The understandings and knowledge I have gained from my earliest recollections of following my sister to school in Aklavik, Northwest Territories, and becoming glued in a swamp of mud, to my recent experiences in a graduate program at the University of Alberta have all played an integral part in who I became.

As I began travelling in the role of researcher, I was struck by a number of things, the first being that I needed to clear away much of the baggage I was carrying. Although my research project was focused on what "enabled" Aboriginal students from the north to succeed rather than on what "disabled" them, my personal agenda was more often focused on anger, fear, oppression, and negativity. It was no longer a matter of placing blame or lashing out, but one of working through each personal experience, positive or negative, and acknowledging them as an experience with a lesson engrained. In gaining this knowledge, I then came full circle and attempted to establish a vision for what my role truly is meant to be as an Aboriginal educator from the north and how I must fulfill that role.

It was a combination of listening to the stories of the participants in my research, reading a concentration of literature regarding the historical and present situation of Aboriginal education, and having discussions with my cohort group in the First Nations Graduate Education Program that triggered many of the memories. At about the same

time as I was beginning to write, I was asked to be a participant in another student's study about Aboriginal educational experiences. I explained at the beginning of my thesis how I "struggled with the constant river of emotion as scenes and images of my own educational journey surfaced and resurfaced." I realized at that point that in order for me to justly describe and summarize the stories of my research participants I had to reflect upon and examine my own past. This was much more than a recognition of biases or limitations to my study; it meant a shift in both attitude and approach.

I do not believe my academic abilities in school were anything more than ordinary or average. Sometimes I excelled, other times I failed. As a student, I suppose I could be considered shy and quiet. I loved reading and writing. In some of the primary grades, I often wondered why the teacher acknowledged marks of other students and did not acknowledge mine, though they may have been equal or higher. I spent time thinking about those instances and considering how it could have affected other Aboriginal students to know that I had a high mark and for me to know that others like me had done well. For a time it seemed to me that only non-Aboriginal students did well. I doubted my own abilities.

In the junior and high school grades, much of the time I coasted. I did not learn how to study, nor did I think about continuing on to postsecondary education. I later learned that some teachers saw potential in my abilities, but this information was not passed on to me. After high school I watched as many of the non-Aboriginal students went south to continue their education. No one had suggested that I think about it or that I should apply to any postsecondary institution. I had no idea what was attainable, and if I did, would I think that I could reach for those goals?

In 1983, I began a Teacher Education Program in the north. I worked hard and I was eager, and excited. During this training I was not challenged to acknowledge and enhance the Aboriginal perspectives from which the students would be coming. In other words, I felt I was taught to be a "White" teacher. The instructors were well meaning and

worked hard to teach subject methodologies. When I began teaching I tried hard to be like other non-Aboriginal teachers in the school in which I worked. I wanted to dress like them, discipline like them, and teach like them. In reflection, I was aware that I loved being with the students, but that teaching was not a particularly rewarding experience for me. There was something missing.

In the early 1990s I attended the University of Saskatchewan to complete my Bachelor of Education degree. This was where, for the first time, I began to research Aboriginal issues regarding education and studied the history of education in the North and within Canada. I wanted to change my approach and when I returned to the north I became more outspoken and lobbied hard to implement culture and language programs. At this time I encountered some difficult situations in the school.

One such issue I shall refer to as the Gingerbread House issue. A certain committee within the school in which I worked decided that this would be a good fundraiser. It was December, and a "gingerbread house" was set up in a classroom. There were small items for sale and students could go Christmas shopping during school hours. Teachers received instruction that each class had an allotted time to shop, and those students with no money were to sit outside the "gingerbread house" and not go in with their class. I knew that the students left outside would be Aboriginal students from low-income families. I became furious and lashed out. This was the 1990s; how dare our northern children be treated in this manner by the school? And furthermore, why has the administration allowed it to happen? I considered this to be a direct act of racism.The issue was blown up throughout the community, Aboriginal organizations and leaders became involved. The Teacher's Union of the Northwest Territories became involved, and this was the beginning of a negative turn for me.

Another issue arose in which an Aboriginal parent reported that her child had had his mouth taped by a teacher in front of the class. The manner in which this incident was

handled and the way in which I felt the teacher involved was protected enraged me. I began to constantly challenge actions and initiatives within our school.

The following year I became the vice principal. I utilized my power negatively, knowing full well that the Aboriginal organizations and community would support me. I tried to take matters into my own hands and control every situation I could. My views were strongly imposed and the school atmosphere was often heavy with tension. I still feel that in some instances I needed to be an advocate for the students; however, I now realize that my negative attitude and actions went against the important Aboriginal values of humility and respect. In retrospect, I realize I should have had more open and frank discussions rather than lashing out.

Personal circumstances brought me to the University of Alberta in the First Nations Graduate Education Program. Here I began to interact with other Aboriginal students, many of whom had been educators in their communities. We discovered that we shared many of the same experiences, frustrations, goals, and visions. We also tried hard to find solutions. My experience within this program slowed me down and challenged me. The free discussions and similarities allowed for healing and growth. Through the Elders, ceremonies, and prayers within our cohort group, a spiritual and emotional balance and dimension was added to my educational experience. My supervisor, Dr. Stan Wilson, a Cree Elder, was supportive and soft spoken—an intellectual and a traditional man. He, along with his wife Peggy, the coordinator of the program, guided us through discussion, prayer, laughter, and sometimes tears. The mentors that I have had the privilege of meeting along the way—the Wilsons, Dr. Eber Hampton, Dr. Manu Meyer, and numerous other individuals—taught me that I had the right vision and that all I needed to do was to develop a personal implementation plan. It was a very humbling, yet strengthening experience.

The research project I undertook allowed me the honor of being in the presence of four students who, although they may not have been aware of it, challenged me to think

positively. Their strong sense of positiveness was all around. They recognized barriers; however, these were offset by their equally strong sense of efficacy. The writing process proved to be difficult and I often resorted to tears or frustration until I realized that in order to truly honor my own educational journey I needed to lighten the load. My experience in graduate school, particularly the thesis project strongly directed me to reflect on my own educational experiences and to move forward in a more positive manner. I now recognize that my many experiences, both positive and negative, each had a lesson to teach.

All the individuals I encountered along the way were mentors. Some presented extremely difficult challenges; others presented a sense of strong, quiet support; and still others, like my participants, presented challenge, combined with hope for the future. My journey along this trail has taken a new turn, the program and the research experience have provided an opportunity for me to break a new trail.

REFERENCES

Abel, K. (1993). *Drumsongs: Glimpses of Dene history.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Assembly of Alaska Native Educators. (1989). *Alaska standards for culturally responsive schools*. Fairbanks Alaska Native Knowledge Network.

Bernard, M. E. (1977). *You can do it! How to boost your child's achievement in school.* New York: Warner Books.

Blondin, G. (1997). *Yamoria, the lawmaker: Stories of the Dene*. Edmonton, AB: NeWest.

Chan, K. S., & Hune,S. (1995). Racialization and panethnicity: From Asians in America to Asian Americans. In W. D. Hawley & A. W. Jackson (Eds.), *Toward a common destiny: Improving race and ethnic relations in America.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chatterjee, B. B. (1983). *The effect of environmental process variables on school achievement (5 1/2 to 11 years): The report of the Varanasi Centre.* New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training.

Clearly, L. M., & Peacock, T. D. (1998). *Collected wisdom.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Codjoe, H. M. (1997). *Black students and school success: A study of the experiences of academically successful African-American-Canadian student graduates in Alberta's secondary schools.* Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Common, R.W. & Frost, L.G. (1988). The implications of the mismeasurement of native student's intelligence tests through the use of standardized intelligence tests. *Canadian journal of native education.* 1 (15), 19-29.

Connelly, M. F., & Clandinin, J. D. (1990). Narrative, experience and the study of curriculum. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 21*(3)

Contenta, S. (1997). *Rituals of Failure.* Toronto: Between the Lines.

Dawson, J. (1998). If my children are proud. *Canadian Journal of Native Education,* 15 (1), 43-50.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New York: New Press.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln. Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research.*

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Desperate strategy for desperate times. (2000, January 10). *News North,* p. .A7.

Deutch. M. (1967). *The disadvantaged child: Selected papers of M. Deutch and associates.* New York: Basic Books.

Devine, M., (1998). *Picking up the threads: Métis of the Mackenzie Basin.* Yellowknife: Metis Heritage, NWT & Parks Canada, Canadian Heritage: Yellowknife, NWT.

Emerson, L. W. (1987). Tradition, change, and survival: Cognitive learning process, culture, and education. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 14*(3), 43.

Erickson, B. H. (1977). *Understanding data.* Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

Erickson, F. (1993). Transformation and school success: The politics and culture of educational achievement. In E. Jacobs & C. Jordan (Eds.), *Minority education: Anthropological perspectives* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (1996). *How to design and evaluate research in education.* Toronto: McGraw Hill.

Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Continuum.

Gay, L. (1987). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and application* (3rd ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.

George, D., & Hirnschall, H. (1974). *My heart soars.* Saanichton, BC: Hancock House.

Green, E. J. (1978). *Birth order, parental interest, and academic achievement.* San Francisco: R & E Research Associates.

Hammersly, M. (1990). *Reading ethnographic research: A critical guide.* London: Longman.

Hampton, E. (1995). Memory comes before knowledge: Research may improve if researchers remember their motives. *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 21*(Suppl.), 46-54.

Hernstein, R. J., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve.* New York: Free Press.

Hookimaw-Witt, J. (1998). Any changes since residential school? *Journal of Native Education, 22*(2), 159-170.

Jacob E., & Jordan, C. (1993). *Understanding minority education: Anthropological perspectives.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Kawagley, O. A. (1995). *A Yupiak world view: A pathway to ecology and spirit.* Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Kirkness, V. J. (1999). Native Indian teachers: A key to progress. *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 23*(1), 57-63.

Lassiter, R. L (1966). *The association of income and educational achievement.* Gainesville: University of Florida Press.

Lee, S. J. (1996). *Unraveling the "model minority" stereotype: Listening to Asian American youth.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Macpherson, N. J. (1991). *Dreams and visions: Education in the Northwest Territories from early days to 1984.* Yellowknife: GNWT, Department of Education.

Maina,, Faith. (1997). Culturally relevant pedagogy: First Nations education in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies,* 17(2)

Malik, M. A. (1966). *School performance of children receiving public assistance in Canada.* Ottawa: Canadian Welfare Council.

Martin, J. (1990). *Kw'atindee Bino community teacher education program outline 1990-92.* Rae Edzo, NT: Dogrib Divisional Board of Education.

Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McCaleb, Saudia P. (1994). *Building Communities of Learners: Collaboration AmongTeachers, Students, Families, and Community.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

McShane, D. & Plas, J. (1988).The relationship of intellectual and psycholinguistic abilities to the achievement gains of American Indian children. *Canadian journal of native education. 1 (15), 66-79*

Meyer, M. A. (1998). *Native Hawaiian epistemology: Contemporary narratives.* Unpublished Ph D Dissertation. Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Milloy, J. S. (1999). *A national crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system, 1879 to 1986.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

NWT Government. (1991). *Our students, our future.* Yellowknife: Department of Education.

NWT Government. (1993). *Dene Kede curriculum document.* Yellowknife: Education, Culture, and Employment; and Secretary of State.

NWT Government. (1994). *People: Our focus for the future.* Yellowknife Department of Education, Culture, and Employment.

NWT Government. (1998). *Educational leadership: Report on a symposium.*

Yellowknife: Department of Education, Culture, and Employment.

NWT Government. (1999a). *Minister's response to the Forum on Education 1999.* Yellowknife: Department of Education, Culture, and Employment.

NWT Government. (1999b). *Towards excellence.* Yellowknife: Department of Education, Culture, and Employment.

Ogbu, J. U. (1978). *Minority education and caste: The American system in cross-cultural perspectives*. New York: Academic Press.

Ogbu, J. U. (1993). Frameworks: Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. In E. Jacob & C. Jordan (Eds.), *Minority education: Anthropological perspectives* (pp. 83-111). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Overvold-Burger, J. (1976). *Our Métis heritage: A portrayal.* Yellowknife: Metis Nation.

Oxford Modern English Dictionary.(1992). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Pepper, F. C., & Henry, S. L.(1986). Social and cultural effects on Indian learning style: Classroom implications. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 13*(1),

Pollard, D. S. (1989). Against the odds: A profile of academic achievers from the urban underclass. *Journal of Negro Education,* 58(3), 297-308.

Profeit-LeBlanc, L. (1993). Raven brings the light. In J. Archibald, V. Friesen, & J. Smith (Eds.), *Courageous spirits: Aboriginal heroes of our children.* Penticton, BC: Theytus Books

Pushkarenko, B. (1998, August 15). Supervisor guilty of sex assault. *Edmonton Journal,* p. A1

Quarter of NWT budget for ECE. (1999, August 23). *News North,* p. B12

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996a). *Education:*Vol *3. Gathering strength.* Ottawa: Canada Communication Group.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996b). Volume 4. *Perspectives and realities.* Ottawa: Canada Communication Group.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview.* Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Sternberg, R. (1998). Group intelligence: Why some groups are better than others. *Intelligence, 12*(4), 351-377.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Webster's II Riverside Dictionary. (1984). Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.

Wilson, S. (1995). Honoring spiritual knowledge. *Canadian Journal of Native Education, 21*(Suppl.), 61-69.

Wolcott, H. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wotherspoon, T. (1998). *The sociology of education in Canada: Critical perspectives.* Toronto: Oxford University Press.

York, G. (1992). *The dispossessed: Life and death in Native Canada.* Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company (Canada).